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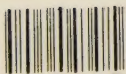


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IT'S A FINE WORLD



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE PEAL OF BELLS

THE BLUE LION

THE MONEY-BOX

THE ORANGE TREE

THE LITTLE ANGEL

THE PLEASURES OF IGNORANCE

THE GOLDFISH

THE GREEN MAN

# IT'S A FINE WORLD

BY  
ROBERT LYND  
("Y.Y.")



METHUEN & CO. LTD.  
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.  
LONDON

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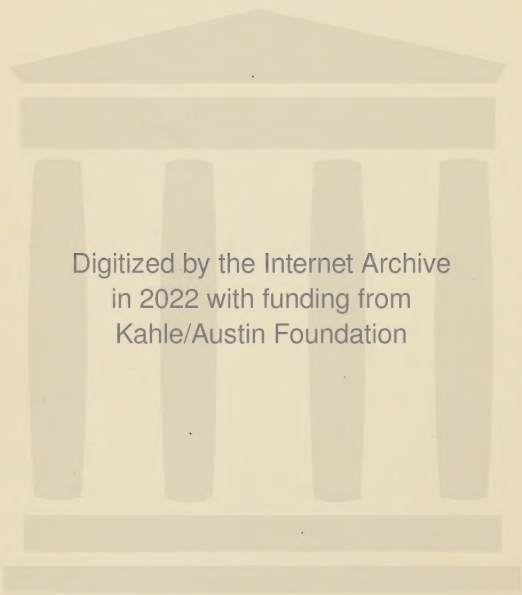
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IT'S A FINE WORLD





## I. It's a Fine World



‘IT’S a fine world we live in, sir.’ It was a Sussex farmer who made this affirmation on Good Friday morning, and he made it with such an air of discoverer’s enthusiasm that he turned me with eight-and-a-half words into a fellow-optimist. He was not talking about farming, over the condition of which, indeed, he was despondent. He was not talking of pious men and their works. He was talking of a ‘jenny-wren’ that had built a nest in a horse’s saddle hanging on a peg in his barn, and of a ‘drove’ of goldfinches that he had seen flying on the slope of the downs.

A wren’s nest in a saddle and a flight of goldfinches may be small enough evidence of the fineness of a world in which millions of human beings cannot get enough to eat and millions are born and die in squalor—a world in which murder and theft and cruelty are common ingredients of the day’s news—in which the country itself is in many places being made as repellent to the eye as the towns—a world that is, from one point of view, a vast graveyard, and, from another point of view, a vast hospital. And yet, trifles though they are, they or things comparable to them are to most of us convincing evidence. We may be pessimists when

## It's a Fine World

we think of the universe rolling to its ruin, but we become optimists at sight of the first crocus in the garden pushing its way into the light. Man's inhumanity to man, when we think of it, may make us mourn; but let a kitten obtrude its paws and bright eyes from under the sofa, and the face of things is changed. Even in a world in which misery was a great deal more widespread than it is, I am sure that human beings would again and again forget their miseries to watch a puppy tearing a slipper, or a frog thrusting its silly eyes above the surface of a pond, or a green beetle with orange spots on its wings resting on a blade of grass, or a tree-creeper running up the stem of one tree after another. The world may, broadly speaking, be a vale of tears, but it contains a million million things in which we cannot help being interested to the point of forgetting everything else for at least the moment. The existence of a single dragon-fly—the existence, indeed, of a single mouse of the right size—is enough to prove conclusively that the world is a fine place.

Not that there are not proofs more momentous and majestic. The smiling courage of Socrates persuades us of the fineness even of a world in which such a man as Socrates is condemned to die. The faith of the martyrs pushes into the background the foulness of their persecutors. The hero, even more than the goldfinch, convinces us that the world is a place in which it

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is good to be alive. No man can be in love without believing that it's a fine world we live in. And we get evidence almost as irresistible from the poets, the painters, and the musicians. A line from *Hamlet*, a song from *Figaro*, a picture by Fra Angelico—in an instant theories of pessimism take and the most melancholy man is in a trance of delight. Even the pessimistic writers, if they write well enough, stir us into optimism by the excellence of their writing. Schopenhauer did not believe that it is a particularly fine world, but it is possible for other people to be all the more convinced that it is a fine world because Schopenhauer wrote in it. Thomas Hardy has probably made as many people believe that it is a fine world as Browning. The truth is, it is impossible to do anything well without proving that it is a fine world. Abraham Lincoln by his character and statesmanship proved it: the cook who prepares a sole perfectly also proves it.

That proofs of one kind or another should be continually recurring is of the utmost importance, for otherwise we should scarcely wish to go on living. Most of the great religions and all the arts may be said to aim at persuading us that it is a fine world or, if not a fine world, at least a fine universe. Many Christians have believed that it is a very evil world, but they have escaped from pessimism by extending their conception of life into Paradise.

## It's a Fine World

As for the poets, their very tragedies are praise of the world. It is very difficult to explain why we should believe that it is a fine world as we read how Agamemnon and Clytemnestra were murdered, and Othello committed suicide after smothering his wife, and Lear was driven to insanity and death by his heartless daughters. It is not only that we have been interested : we are interested in the murders of Burke and Hare, but we do not, if we read about them, feel that the world is finer for their having lived. As we read a great tragedy, on the other hand, we experience a strange sense of exaltation, of the essential glory of life. And it is a curious fact that we should feel less exaltation if the heroes of the tragedies were in the end saved from their doom. If a triumphant Lear lived happily ever after with a Cordelia happily married to a happy prince, we should be robbed of much of our pleasure in reading about them. And yet Lear would have been none the less noble if an accident of fate had prolonged his life. The fineness of the world, one would think, would have been even better attested by Hamlet's survival of the duel than by his succumbing to the plot of a murderous uncle. A world in which Romeo and Juliet continued to live ought to be at least as beautiful as a world in which they died largely through a misunderstanding. Yet, somehow or other, life—in a play—seems even finer with an unhappy

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than with a happy ending. Possibly there are modern critics who would argue that this shows that there is a Sadistic element in our appreciation of tragedy, but we know that tender-hearted people who would not hurt a fly are among those who are most enraptured by the tragic deaths of heroes. I doubt if the most virtuous man on earth obtains in a work of imagination one-tenth as much pleasure from the death of a villain that he obtains from the death of a hero. Probably this is partly due to the fact that the greater the doom the greater is our sympathy with the victim of the doom, if he be sufficiently noble.

Our pleasure in tragedy is in part the pleasure of sympathy at its deepest. In ordinary life we are not conscious of the pleasure of sympathy when we are witnesses of a tragedy, because we are acutely conscious of the suffering of a fellow-creature. On the other hand, when we are remote enough from the tragedy, as we are, not only in a work of pure imagination, but in a biography, we see suffering swallowed up in greatness of spirit, and, if the sufferer is a hero, his story is a story of triumph. Romeo and Juliet, conquered by death, seem stronger than death in their love. The hero in his suffering seems large as Prometheus, and to be Prometheus is somehow to live triumphantly. It has always been in tragedy that man has enjoyed his greatest triumphs. Even Satan

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triumphed when he became a tragic figure in Milton's Hell. That, possibly, gives us a clue to the nature of the pleasure we take in tragedy. It is more than the pleasure of sympathy. It is pleasure in deathless courage—the courage of a noble figure matched against omnipotent fate. Such courage convinces us that it's a fine world we live in. The figures of the heroes and heroines of tragedy are figures whose presence would ennoble the Elysian fields.

Much of the realistic fiction of the last century is already dead because it is largely populated by men and women who would be as much out of place in the Elysian fields as sneak-thieves. You can imagine almost any animal—even a toad or an adder—in the Elysian fields more easily than the majority of the characters of the realists. Our interest in these people is mainly the interest of curiosity—a source of pleasure not negligible, but insufficient alone to keep us permanently interested in a human being. The writers who continue to delight us do not somehow leave us with the impression that the world is either an odious or a dull place. Swift attempted to prove that it was odious, but proved it so wittily that it was impossible to believe it. Apart from this, Swift is himself the presiding character in his writings, and we are always aware of him in the background as a figure of noble rage—a figure that enriches life like the tragic hero himself.



## It's a Fine World

As I have said, however, you need not go to the great men and their works for evidence that the world is a fine place. You will find it in any wood or in any garden as easily as in Plutarch. Among animals, I confess it is difficult to find it in the house-fly or the horse-fly, but we can find it in the spider and in the pig. Not, perhaps, so abundantly as in a drove of goldfinches or in a wren building its nest in a saddle, but enough to turn the scale between pessimism and optimism. So, at least, I thought as the farmer told me of his discovery of the nest in his barn. I would rather that such a thing should happen to me than that I should be the conqueror of Asia. I would rather even meet a man to whom it had happened than be the conqueror of Asia. Luckily I met him.

## II. The Grouzers    ∞    ∞    ∞    ∞

HE was a tall blond man, clean-shaven and yet dirtily shaven, with a soft hat tilted sideways above a face that might have been an amateur actor's. He was sitting on a low table in a saloon bar in the south of London, one foot on the floor and the other leg swinging like a pendulum, and he was talking to an older and more rotund man who sat smoking a pipe in a wooden arm-chair beside the fire.

It was seven o'clock on the evening of Boxing Day, and the saloon bar was almost empty: besides the two men at the fire there were only a little, active, cheerful man standing at the bar with a glass of beer, and myself. There must have been rather more people partitioned off in the public bar. One could hear through the partition the sound of a number of young men baiting an older one who was drunk to the point of semi-articulateness. It was impossible to hear what they said, they made so much noise, and one could not even guess what they were guffawing at when he answered their various questions in sentences all of which sounded like 'Wuzzhawuzzhawuzzha'. At one point I gathered that he was boasting of what he would do in a war, and that in certain circumstances he would cut somebody's head

## The Grouzers

off and then jump on him—‘*currisedoff anthen-zhumponim.*’ And now and then, exhilarated instead of teased by the laughter of the others, he would burst, like a husky megaphone, into a song with a chorus that, if I heard it right, began :

‘I’m not a Don,  
A-roameen on the lawn,’

while the barman, joining in the laughter, called out ‘Order, gentlemen, please!’

The blond man on the table swung his left leg impatiently. ‘Well,’ he said to the round man in the chair, ‘I shan’t be sorry to get back to work to-morrow. I’m sick of this holiday. What’s the use of a holiday at this time of year? Everybody’s cold and miserable. There’s nothing to do. There’s nowhere to go. You can’t go for a day in the country in December as if it was August, and all it means is you’re simply driven into a pub. I tell you, it’s no good to anybody.’ The older man took his pipe out of his mouth to agree, in an asthmatic voice, that it was no good to anybody. ‘I guarantee,’ said the blond man, waving the hand in which he was holding a glass of beer, ‘that if you go to any shop or business house to-morrow morning, you’ll find that two out of every three men will have come back to work clotted—absolutely clotted.’ The old man took his pipe out of his mouth again, simply to nod.

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'The only good thing I know about the Christmas holidays,' continued the blond man, 'is that for two days there are no newspapers.' 'That's a good thing,' coughed the older man wheezily. 'I only wish,' said the blond man, 'that instead of two days it was a week. What'll you have, Joe?' he called to the little man at the bar, going over towards him with his own empty glass. 'Mine's a B.B.,' said the little man. 'B.B. and a bitter,' said the blond man to the barman. 'I guarantee,' he went on, 'that if the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* and *Daily News* didn't come out for a week, when they did come out again their circulation would have gone down ninety per cent. Nobody would want 'em. We'd have learnt to do without 'em.' And he stalked back gloomily in his brown shoes to the table, and, sitting down on it, took a long draught of beer. 'I gather, then, Mr. Thompson,' said the little man, in precise accents, 'that you regard newspapers as a luxury?' 'A luxury?' cried the blond man, in the indignant roar of one who has been grossly misinterpreted. 'I regard them as a millstone—a millstone hanging round our necks. We're their slaves. They dictate to us every opinion we possess.' 'They do try to influence our opinions,' admitted the little man. 'Try?' exclaimed the other; 'they succeed. They not only tell me how I must vote in politics. They tell me what I must do

## The Grouzers

in my private life. I tell you, I'm the slave of the newspapers, and so are you, Joe.'

'I'm not a Don,  
A-roameen on the lawn,'

came the roar from beyond the partition. 'And what alternative would you suggest?' asked the little man. 'That is not difficult to answer,' said the blond man. 'Take the present time, for instance. I guarantee'—for it was the time of King George's illness—'that at the present moment there's only one thing every Englishman wants to know—"How's the King?"' Do you agree? Well, then, do you need a newspaper to tell you that? What I should like to see is all the newspapers abolished and an official bulletin placed in the window of every Post Office giving the public such items of news as the Government knows the public is interested in.' 'But,' suggested the little man, 'might that not lead to Government control, with the party in power giving the public what it liked?' 'This,' declared the blond man, 'is not a party question. I guarantee that every man, whether he's a Conservative, a Tory, or a Labourite, wants at the present time to know only one thing—"How's the King?"' Everything else in the papers is deception and hogwash. Can you name a single other thing that's of the slightest importance to anybody?' 'I like,' ventured the little man, after a moment's

## It's a Fine World

thought, 'to read the reports of the Test Matches.' 'But they're not *important*,' argued the other; 'you can't pretend that cricket is *important*.' 'Well,' said the little man, 'cricket gives employment, doesn't it?' The blond man laughed contemptuously. 'Now you're being argumentative, Joe,' he said; '*now* you're being foolish.' 'Well, if you don't like cricket,' persisted the little man, 'what about the unemployed? Don't the papers tell us about the unemployed?' 'Bah!' said the blond man; 'I'm tired of the unemployed. There have always been thousands of people unemployed in this country, and there always will be. The unemployed have been there since the time of William the Conqueror, and, if it hadn't been for the newspapers, we should never have heard of 'em.' 'Well, any way, what's yours?' said the little man. 'Nothing more, thank you, Joe.' 'Come on. Christmas drinks.' And the blond man, yielding, strolled over to the bar to exchange an empty glass for a full one.

'What I can't forgive the papers for,' he continued, 'is the harm they have done in encouraging the modern craze for pleasure. They get hold of the women, make them discontented with their homes, and drive them out to theatres, cinemas, and dance-halls when they ought to be looking after their husbands and kiddies. God, when I think of the modern



## The Grouzers

woman ! ' The round man gurgled in acquiescent indignation in his chair. ' I like,' said the blond man, ' to see people enjoying themselves, but if my wife expects me to put on glad rags and take her down west, not one night in the week, but every night in the week, she's living in a fool's paradise. That's not what a man marries for, and, if there are very few happy marriages in the world to-day, it's because women won't stay at home in the evenings, and that's the fault of the newspapers. After all, what does a man want after his day's work ? Isn't it a nice little dinner, a cosy little fire, and then to sit down in his slippers and talk to his wife and kiddies ? If women only knew ! ' he said, taking a swig of bitter. ' But they don't, because the papers tell them that woman's place is the restaurant. I have a good many married friends, and I can think of only one marriage that has been really successful. He's a great pal of mine, and his wife—well, she's what you might call woman personified. Meets him at the door when he comes home from the City, gives him his slippers, looks after his meals herself, spends every evening at home with him, except occasionally, when she goes out to play the violin in an orchestra at some local concert. And, wherever she goes, he's sitting in the audience as proud as proud can be. No dipping into one of the local hostleries for a quick one. Doesn't want to. And yet,

## It's a Fine World

before he married, he used to be fond of booze. But now '—he took another gulp of beer—' he never feels the need of it. And why ? Because she's a real woman.'

The round man cleared his throat and rolled in his chair. 'There's only one drawback to their happiness,' continued the blond man sadly. 'No kiddies. I don't know what you think,' he said, with a seraphic, absent-minded look in his eyes, 'but I always say that no home is perfect without kiddies. I'm mad about kiddies. When I lived down at Crayfield we always gave a Christmas "do" for the local kiddies, and I was Father Christmas for three years in succession. All the local bigwigs there, and kiddies tumbling all over me. God, how they enjoyed themselves ! Put me among lots of kiddies and I don't ask for any other company.' And he paused to drain his glass. The round man rolled in his chair again, took out his pipe, and coughed. 'Children are all right,' he wheezed, 'but you can have too much of 'em. Sometimes they get on your nerves. I have three grandchildren at home, and many a time I have to come over here simply to escape from 'em.' 'Yes,' the blond man half-admitted, 'I suppose you *can* have too much of 'em.' 'Were you ever,' asked the round man, 'in a railway-train with a child in the carriage ?' 'Torture,' agreed the blond man quickly ; 'positive torture a kid in a train. But then,

## The Grouzers

again, it's the fault of the modern parent. Never keeps the kiddies in order. No discipline. Nothing but indulgence. What's yours, Joe ? ' And he called on the barman to refill the glasses.

' Here's to work,' he said, raising his glass to his lips, ' and, praise the pigs ! it starts again to-morrow.' Again through the partition came the husky roar, now a little slow and sleepy, of :

' I'm not a Don,  
A-roameen on the lawn.'

Above the framed advertisements of proprietary whiskies on the walls, the berries on the sprigs of Christmas holly were glistening in the incandescent light. ' I often think,' resumed the blond man——

### III. Anon.



IT has been said that Anon. is the most delightful of the poets. He is also the oldest and the most prolific of them. His age exceeds that of the Wandering Jew, and the mere names of his works fill a large book. Many people say that he wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and, since those days, there is scarcely a branch of literature in which he has not displayed his incomparable genius. Possibly—for I am no scholar—the *Iliad* was not the earliest of his deathless works. I understand that it is to him, rather than to Moses, that modern scholarship attributes the Pentateuch, and he certainly wrote the *Book of Job*. More varied and fertile than Bacon himself, he gave us in one age the legends of Cuchullain and Fionn and, in another age, the *Letters of Junius*. One day he would write the *Drapier's Letters*; a century or so later, when the novel had become popular, he set to and composed the earliest of the Waverley Novels. Nothing comes amiss to his pen—memoirs, drama, verse, or journalism. Some of the most successful books of reminiscences of our time have sprung from his brain. He created one of the sensations of the age with *An Englishwoman's Love Letters*; and, as if his other work were not

## Anon.

enough for one man, he writes all the leading articles in the newspapers.

Naturally, when so excellent an author is known to have written a book, public curiosity is immediately awakened. Revelations about the conduct of great men seem doubly interesting if they are made by him and not by a nobody with a name. He exercises a spell on the imagination like the Man in the Iron Mask, who might easily have been forgotten if he had not been unknown. That is, perhaps, why Anon. has for centuries been so dominant a force, not only in literature, but in politics. Statesmen, according to report, have often trembled at his nod. From his position on the leader-page of the newspapers he makes and unmakes public opinion. It is probable that the ordinary citizen is much more influenced by what Anon. says than by anything said by Mr. Shaw or Mr. Wells. Certainly, if I were a politician, I should not mind whether Mr. Shaw or Mr. Wells disagreed with me, if I had the whole-hearted support of Anon. Even the most powerful men find themselves impotent in comparison with this marvellous secret force. Had not Lord Northcliffe to make use of Anon.'s pen in his attacks on Lord Kitchener? Even so great a journalist had to admit that Anon. was a greater journalist than he. Occasionally, such is the jealousy of lesser men, we hear a demand that all leading articles should be

## It's a Fine World

signed. This demand is invariably made by those who wish to weaken the influence of the Press and to deprive it of its most masterly voice. A more flattering tribute could scarcely be paid to Anon.'s influence as a journalist. Journalism without Anon. would be like Fascism without Mussolini. He ought to be elected permanent President of the National Union of Journalists.

But the activities of Anon. through his long life have not been confined to literature and journalism. If I am not mistaken, he built the Pyramids and some of the loveliest of the Christian churches. He was a great sculptor in Greece, and, as a painter, he has enriched the world with many masterpieces, though at times he has descended to the vilest daubs. It was his genius, too, that gave most of the cities of the earth, and the mountains, and the rivers their names. It was he who cherished in his memory the early annals of great peoples, and preserved the story of their origin before the invention of writing. He taught the medicinal uses of plants before there were doctors, and imparted wisdom in saws before there were philosophers. He made the first spade and the first plough, and it is to him we owe those blessed inventions, the house, the bed, and the table. It was he who discovered Nature's purpose in producing the grape, and it was he who invented the bottle. Great enough



## Anon.

inventions have been made in recent centuries by men whose names we know ; but it is to Anon. we owe most of those inventions that made civilization possible. I do not wish to disparage Watt and Stephenson and the rest of them ; but Greece and Rome existed before them in the Golden Age of Anon.

No one else, indeed, can show so astonishing a record of beneficence. That he has committed many crimes, including murder, in his time is true enough ; but here he has the excuse that he was not the first murderer and that he was led astray by evil example. Nor was the first sin his. Whether Anon. was present in the Garden of Eden we do not know ; but we do know that Adam and Eve sinned before him. Nor has he ever throughout history been addicted to the lust of conquest that razes cities and burns down the dwellings of the poor and slaughters men in battle. He is no rival of Alexander or Tamerlane or Napoleon in violent deeds. He has built cities but sacked none. He has made civilizations but destroyed none. Never has he aspired unjustly to a throne, nor has he taken pleasure in the oppression of the people. Study the major crimes of history, and how few of them can be attributed to Anon. ! Not the murder of Julius Caesar, or the burning of Joan of Arc, or the death of Lincoln.

The truth is, modesty like his does not sort

## It's a Fine World

well with crime. There is a furtive kind of criminal who likes to work in the dark, but in this he is merely masquerading as Anon., and, more often than not, with the help of an efficient police force, he is ultimately proved not to be Anon. at all. The most serious fault I know, indeed, that can be ascribed to Anon. is a habit of scandalmongering. With his active imagination, he appears to be unable to avoid inventing fables, and I have heard incredible stories even about my contemporaries that were undoubtedly born in his brain. Not that I blame him overmuch for this. He does not know the people about whom he invents the stories and his fables are as free from malice as the make-believe of a child. Infinitely more blameworthy are those who repeat the tittle-tattle of Anon., knowing that he so seldom speaks the truth. Let us imitate the virtues of Anon. and avoid and pardon his one grave vice.

When we feel censoriously towards him, indeed, we should do well to remember that, liar though he may be, he is at least an example to all of us in his general honesty. I do not know, for example, of any other living man who is so honest that he pays income tax even though the Income Tax Commissioners do not ask him for it. Yet Anon. is constantly doing this, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer is as constantly acknowledging his payments in *The Times*. The very phrase that appears in the

## Anon.

acknowledgment, 'Conscience money', is a tribute to Anon.'s nobility of character. It is clear that the Chancellor realizes that only a good man could behave in this fashion and wishes to incite other taxpayers to take Anon. as their model. The Chancellor makes no announcement in *The Times* when you and I pay our income tax, because we do it without virtue and under compulsion. But, when Anon. pays, it is a good deed shining in a naughty world, and is a thing worthy to be announced to mankind in general. What more touching example of virtue have we had in recent years than was contained in the letter sent from Anon. to Mr. Snowden when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, which ran : ' Dear Sir, I once defrauded you of £5. Remorse gnaws my conscience. I am sending you 5s. When the remorse gnaws again, I will send you some more.' Anon. is always doing that kind of thing. A few months ago, he remembered having ridden in a tramcar in Brooklyn without paying his fare in the year 1883, and sent the equivalent of 10d. to the company—2d. for the fare and 8d. for interest. Similarly, not long ago he remembered having in a moment of abstraction stolen a threepenny bit from a jeweller in Swansea, and forthwith he posted six penny stamps to the jeweller, adding 3d. for interest on the sum he stole. That he usually pays about £2,000 a year in income tax

## It's a Fine World

shows that he is no niggard with his money. If he is not a rich man, he at least pays like one.

That he is generous, however, is known to everybody. You cannot pick up any list of subscriptions to a charity without finding his name there. He scatters his contributions lavishly, giving anything from 6d. to £100,000. Quite recently the world has been hearing that he had given £100,000 to the hospitals as a thank-offering for King George's recovery, concealing his identity under the pseudonym, 'Audax'. 'How like Anon.!' I thought when I read of it. But the newspapers thought otherwise. Convinced that Audax was not really Anon., they sent out reporters and photographers to discover the truth and in the end they proved that not I but they were right. At the same time, it must be admitted that the gift was worthy of Anon. and that, in making it, Mr. Roberts was nobly imitating Anon.'s example. For Anon. is never weary of well-doing. This very week, did he not send me a bottle of yellow Chartreuse forty-one years old? He is, indeed, as conspicuously a good man as a good writer. We are indebted to him at every turn of our lives. He it is who at once gave us the ballads and taught us the lovely combinations of roast duck and green peas and of lamb and mint sauce. Let us, then, praise famous men, but let us not forget to praise

## Anon.

Anon. Is he not the man who won the War when famous rulers and statesmen had made it ? If he would but pay for it as well, what could be more like him, what more worthy of his record of beneficence to his fellows ?

#### IV. Storm      ♪      ♪      ♪      ♪      ♪

‘**B**EAUTIFUL place,’ said my friend, as he told me of the ideal spot for a late November holiday, ‘Looking right across the Atlantic. Bracing. One of the most bracing places I’ve ever been in my life. ‘The Windwhistle Hotel’s right on the top of the cliff, and the Three Coughs Hotel, which is nearly as good, is about half a mile away. Food’s awfully good at both of them. I should go to the Windwhistle if I were you.’ And so I set off from London on an afternoon of mild sunshine, anticipating a fortnight of white clouds piled above laughing blue waves that thundered all day long on a shore as lovely as any that ever existed in a dream.

I made the journey by easy stages, pausing at Farnham to see a film of which the poster was very enticing, and pausing at Exeter again to see another film that I had forgotten I had already seen in London.

On the morning on which I left Exeter pretty little whirlpools of red leaves were dancing round the Cathedral. ‘How charming!’ I thought; ‘but how impossible it is to be completely happy unless one is in sight of the sea.’ I called the attention of the porter at the Clarence Hotel to the dance of the leaves,

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but he shook his head and said he didn't like the look of things. 'Have you seen the glass?' he said. 'I've never seen it drop so suddenly before. The bottom's fallen right out of it.' I smiled at his nervous fears, lowered the hood of the car, and crawled off through the trams towards the Windwhistle Hotel and the great wide spaces of the Atlantic Ocean.

Two miles beyond Exeter my companion said that it was raining, and that we must have the hood up. I said, nonsense, that it was only a drop, and that we should only have to put the hood down again in a minute or two. Three miles outside Exeter she said that it was really raining, and four miles outside Exeter I got out and helped to put the hood up. 'Anyhow,' said I, 'better get the bad weather over before we get to the Windwhistle. I hope, now that it has begun to rain, it will rain itself out.' And at that moment, as if in answer to my words, the rain began to fall in an increasing volume. Trees began to rock as we flew past them. The wind seemed to blow bucketfuls of water against the windscreen. The windscreen wiper, which a mechanic must have treated with an oily cloth, swung determinedly backwards and forwards, leaving a greasy layer on the glass which made it more and more difficult to see. Gusts whistled under the hood, like a gale in a ship's rigging.

As we covered mile after mile, and got into

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the open country, the storm swooped down on us, shook us till we rattled, caught the nose of the car and swung it round as if it were a boat at sea, rushed at us head foremost and all but brought us to a standstill.

Conversation in the uproar was impossible, but I shouted to my companion : ' There ought to be a great sea after this at the Windwhistle.' She shouted back : ' Do you think so ? ' Ten miles later, I shouted to her : ' Are cars ever blown over ? ' She shouted back : ' Yes.'

Just at that moment, a farmer with his clothes blowing about him, stood in the middle of the road in front of us waving his arms wildly. We pulled up, and he told us that there was a child bleeding to death in the house as a result of having been struck by a falling slate, and asked us to call on the doctor in the next town, seven or eight miles away, and send him out as fast as possible. We tore down the hill towards the town, the car leaping the angles of the road, rocking, kicking, rattling, the hood now ripped and torn by the gale. The windscreen was by this time almost opaque with oil, and it was scarcely possible to see the road before us. ' It won't do the child any good if we don't reach the doctor alive,' my companion shouted as the car gave a sideways leap like a startled kitten. ' That's true,' I shouted back, and, as we swung round the corner into the town another man stood in the middle of the road with waving



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arms and stopped us to tell us that a tree and some telegraph wires had been blown down, and that it was impossible to get into the town that way. My companion crept under the tree in search of a doctor while I drove back into the country in order to find another entrance. Our duty discharged, we set off up the hill over the moor again, and certainly everywhere there were signs that a gale was blowing. At intervals along the road men were at work hacking at fallen trees. There were few cars on the road, but one little one which we passed had had its side-windows blown in. 'I'll be glad,' I shouted to my companion, 'when we get to the Wind-whistle.' 'So shall I,' she shouted.

When we reached it at last and drove down the lane towards it in the dusk, there was the Atlantic below us, and it was as rough as any sea I have ever seen—a great, grey, gurly monster, with tossing wave-tops and with great flecks of foam rising high into the air and flying above our heads like sea-birds. After a wash, I went into the drawing-room where the only other two visitors who were staying at the hotel, a man and his wife, were having tea. 'Rough outside,' I said to the man. He shook his head: 'You should have been here this morning,' he said. 'It was better then. This wind's not in the right quarter for a really rough sea. With a south-west wind you only get a surface roughness. If it would only go a few points

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to the south ! ' ' It looked quite rough to me,' I said. ' No,' he said gloomily, ' that's not really rough. I was just saying to my wife I've been disappointed in the waves to-day. Were you ever in a gale, sir, that blew a hundred miles an hour ? ' I said that I didn't know, that I probably had, that as a boy in Belfast I once had to hold on to a lamp-post to keep myself from being blown away. ' Ah,' he said, ' I was once on the Scillies when the wind was blowing 108 miles an hour. I shan't easily forget that. You couldn't stand up in it. It was a real gale.' ' Perhaps,' I suggested, ' this one may get worse.' ' I'm afraid not,' he said, ' there are four strengths of storm—a half-gale, a strong gale, a storm, and a hurricane, and this is only number three.' The windows rattled as he spoke and the walls rocked, while the wind raced screaming round the shelterless hotel.

I proposed to my companion that, as there was only a number-three wind blowing we should go out and look at the sea. We put on our coats and went out into the night. As we reached the corner of the hotel a wind rushing in the opposite direction met and staggered us. We leaned forward against it and zigzagged into it for a dozen yards or so. Then a fierce blast flung itself on us, choked us like a bursting breaker, wrenched the bag from under my companion's arm, flung it on the ground, opened it,

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and swept it along the earth, with money, letters, bills (paid and unpaid), mascots, and all the rest of its contents flying in every direction, some of them over a wall into a field. I spent the next hour in the deepening darkness chasing bills and a packet containing a four-leaved shamrock with a walking-stick. By the time I had found everything except a lucky elephant, a latchkey, and a penny with a hole in it, our friend had returned from a walk to the coast-guard station. He was evidently in a state of depression. 'I'm afraid the wind's dropping,' he said. 'They say that to-morrow it will probably be number five.' 'What's number five?' I asked him. 'Fresh breeze,' he said, contemptuously. I reeled towards the hotel by his side, and, as the wind caught me and flung me against him, I apologized, and shouted: 'Surely this must be more than number three.' 'No,' he yelled back, 'this is nothing. You should have been in that hurricane on the Scillies. I shall never forget it.'

I found him next morning reading the weather forecasts in the newspaper and going to the windows (which it was almost impossible to see through, so blurred were they with sea-spray and driving rain) to look disappointedly at the raging grey breakers. After breakfast we went out together, and he put his hand above his eyes to gaze towards the flagstaff of the coast-guard station. 'I can't see very well,' he said,

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'perhaps you can tell me whether the south cone is hoisted.' 'No, I don't think so,' I said. 'I think it is,' he said; 'you see that black thing about half-way down.' 'That's only where the ropes join the flagstaff,' I suggested. 'No, I think it's the south cone,' he declared; 'I'll go and ask Dick.' He went away to see the waiter, and came back with a happy smile to say that Dick agreed with him that the south cone was hoisted. 'However,' he said, 'I'll run along to the coastguard station and see.' Half an hour later he came back with misery written in every line of his face. 'You were right,' he said; 'it wasn't the south cone.' 'Still, the forecast's pretty bad,' I comforted him. 'If the wind only would turn to the south,' he said, 'you would see the sea breaking over the Island.' He assured me, indeed, that a few hours before our arrival the gale had been quite strong, reminding him of the hurricane on the Scillies, and he went over to the wall of the hotel, caught the corner with one hand and gave me an imitation of the way in which he had had to bend and cling to his hat as he battled his way through it.

And so it continued all the time we were there. The sea, which was the colour of a zinc bucket, roared landward under its leopard-skin of foam. The wind howled so that one could neither sleep by night nor open a window by day, and, if one went out into it, one was

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choked and battered, while seagulls soared hungrily above one's head, and the spray wet one's face and salted one's lips. There were, I admit, intermissions—on two days the wind was really number five. But it fell only to rise again, and seldom did a few hours pass till the sea was once more the zinc-bucket-coloured monster of the first day.

In the evening we sometimes played slosh with our friend in a fireless billiard-room in which no window seemed to have been opened for years. 'The table's dead—very dead, don't you think?' he asked during our first game. And I reflected bitterly, 'Playing slosh on a dead billiard-table in a gale—what a holiday! And I once thought I liked the Atlantic.' As we played, I tried to comfort myself by talking about beautiful places by the sea in the North of Ireland, and he said he had always wanted to go there, and would like to go the whole way by sea. 'But mightn't it be rough?' his wife asked apprehensively. 'Rough?' he laughed, 'I should like it rough. Not like the hurricane on the Scillies,' he explained, 'but *rough*.'

## V. A Gloomy Cove



IT is, I suppose, necessary to the continuance of life that human beings should be able to say to themselves at times, 'This cannot go on for ever.' We said it to ourselves and to each other every day at the Windwhistle Hotel during the bad weather. 'This cannot last,' we said in the morning, as the storm took up the sea, flung it against the cliffs, and blew it inland over the hotel in flying foam. 'It will blow itself out,' we said next morning as the rain beat like a raging sea against our windows. 'It has to get worse before it gets better,' we said with desperate optimism the third morning as the very beds in the hotel rocked in the fury of the gale. That, I am sure, is the right spirit in which to live, and a brave man would go on lying to himself in this fashion though the gale blew for a year. I am not a brave man, however. I cannot face the elements with a bulldog courage, but instinctively avoid and retreat from every form of danger and discomfort. I know men who would have stayed on at the Windwhistle with grimly set jaws merely in order to prove that by their powers of persistence they could wear down foul weather itself. As for me, after a few days I slunk away—a fugitive, in a mud-splashed car with

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a torn hood—battered and bruised by the same gale that had been blowing when I arrived.

It was, perhaps, foolish to go to Mullion in such a season, but I had always wanted to go to Mullion, and, besides, I was confident that by the time I reached Mullion the gale would have blown itself out. As things turned out, it hadn't. If anything, the storm was rather fiercer at Mullion than at the Windwhistle. There are two pleasures of the sea—to smell it and to see it. But at Mullion, on the day we arrived, you could do neither. If you tried to look at the sea the gale blinded you, and if you tried to smell it the gale choked you. If you took a walk it blew you and your coat and your hat into such Protean and fantastic shapes that dogs rushed out and barked at you as though you were a monster.

The hotel at which we stayed was the emptiest but one I had ever known. It looked empty even before we had set foot in it, and we found that there were only two other people staying in it besides ourselves—a disconsolate old gentleman who looked as if he had just about had enough of it and his wife. He nodded bitterly as I entered the drawing-room, and stuffed tobacco angrily into his pipe. Every now and then he got up, stamped to the window, looked out, and uttered a disgusted pant. 'Do you think it looks like clearing, John?' his wife asked him. 'It looks,' he declared, gazing



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out seaward, 'just about as like clearing as it must have looked on the first day of the Flood.' He uttered another disgusted pant, returned to his arm-chair, took up a newspaper, threw it on the sofa, took up a book, threw it on the table, and, lying back, glared at me over his spectacles. 'Rather bad weather to be on this part of the coast,' I said to him. He glared at me again over his spectacles, said firmly, 'I don't want to talk about it,' and took up the newspaper again and tried to read it. In the awkward silence that followed his wife left the room, and a few moments later—having come by accident, I suppose, on the weather forecast—he emitted an oathlike noise, crushed the paper in his hands, and hurled it back on to the sofa. Then he got up, stamped across to the window again, and scowled at the Atlantic Ocean. I had been feeling pretty cross with the Atlantic myself, but, compared with this man's passion, my dislike of the Atlantic seemed almost Laodicean. I was conscious of such a strain in the atmosphere that I was beginning to feel sorry that I had come to this particular hotel, when the old gentleman returned to his chair, let his chin sink into his breast, and, looking across at me with the air of a penitent child, said: 'I'm afraid, sir, I was rather rude just now. I'm sorry. But'—and the glare came into his eyes again—'I've been here for a week.' I told him that that was all right,



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and, for the sake of carrying the conversation into quiet waters, suggested that Mullion must be a beautiful place in fine weather. 'Beautiful?' he echoed bitterly, 'Oh, Mullion's beautiful all right. Look at it!' he cried, waving his arm towards the window. 'I said "in fine weather",' I protested. 'And I say,' he replied, '"in any weather"'. In all kinds of weather Mullion is beautiful—B-E-A-U-T-I-F-U-L. That's why we're here, isn't it? But, look here,' he said, changing his tone suddenly, 'you mustn't mind what I say. I know I'm not quite sane about Mullion. I'm sure it's the most beautiful place in the world, but I can tell you that wild horses will never drag me here again. I've no luck with it.

'Last August my wife and I came to Mullion for a fortnight's holiday. A friend of my wife's told us that it was the most beautiful place in England, and lent us a book that said that the two most beautiful places on earth were Mullion Cove and Kynance Cove, and that Mullion Cove was the more beautiful of the two. Well, we set out for Mullion in the car, and arrived at this hotel, and stayed at it for a fortnight, and do you know, I've never set eyes on Mullion Cove yet.' 'How odd!' said I: 'the Cove's quite near this, isn't it?' He nodded. 'That's the trouble,' he said: 'it's too near. You see, I bought a car about a year ago—have *you* a car?' I nodded. 'Ah,' said he, 'then you

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may have had the same experience. Do you know, every morning, as soon as breakfast was over, my wife—you don't mind my asking, do you, but are you married ? ' I told him that I was. ' Ah,' he said, ' then you know what women are. Well, every morning as soon as breakfast was over, my wife used to say, " Where shall we go to-day ? " get out the map, look for all the bits of Cornwall that were furthest away from where we were staying, and say, " Let's do Tintagel," or " Let's go to Penzance and Land's End and round by St. Ives," or " What about Bude ? " I didn't mind at first, because I felt like her that we could see Mullion Cove any day. We had only to walk a step or two from the hotel and we were there. At the end of a week we had seen about as much of Cornwall as any sane human being could want to see. We had even been to all the Coves in the neighbourhood that were far enough away to go to in a car. She made me drive her down to Church Cove down a hill where it was almost impossible to turn the car, and I spent about an hour backing and wheel-spinning, with the car making such an infernal row that a poor chap who had gone there for quiet came out of a house and denounced motorists for ruining the country-side. She made me drive down to Cadgwith, though the hill there's a precipice, and I couldn't enjoy the beauty of the place—and I'm told it's a very

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beautiful place—for thinking how we were to get up again. But Mullion Cove? Oh, lord, no. Mullion Cove was only a step away, and we could go there any day.

‘Well, one day I determined to make a stand, and was just going to say, “Let’s leave the car in the garage to-day and enjoy ourselves,” when my wife suddenly remembered that there was something wrong with the wind-screen-wiper, and said that we must take the car to a garage and have it mended. You say you’re married. Has your wife a passion for garages? It’s my experience that all women who have anything to do with motor-cars have a passion for garages. With women it’s always either “Let’s go somewhere a hundred miles from here” or “Let’s take the car to a garage. I’m sure the clutch has slipped.” Ever since the car stopped on a hill one day and began to run backwards because of a slipping clutch my wife has been great on slipped clutches. She knows nothing about machinery, you know—I don’t know much myself—but every time I make a bit of noise when I’m changing gear, and every time the car slows down at the top of a long steep hill, she’s convinced that something’s wrong with the clutch—either that or the gear-box. Oh, she’s great on the gear-box. And when she’s like that, it’s no use arguing with her. She tells me I’m risking both our lives unless we take the car to a garage to be

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overhauled. "Overhauled"—that's what she always says to the fellow at the garage.

' This time, however, as I told you, it wasn't the gear-box, and it wasn't the clutch. It was the windscreen-wiper. And not only that, but she wouldn't have it that we could have it mended anywhere but at Falmouth, where there was a garage she had taken a fancy to one day. Well, we got to Falmouth, spent about an hour in a garage—I hate the smell of a garage—especially when I'm at the sea-side—and they told us that they thought some kind of rubber tube ought to be renewed, and that it would be ready in an hour. After that we thought we might as well spend the rest of the day at Falmouth, and, when we went to get the car back in the evening, they had put the new tube in, but still the windscreen-wiper wasn't working. They said something must be wrong with the machinery, and that they would take the thing off, see to it, and have it ready next day if we came back for it. My wife brightened up at that. It meant another visit to a garage, though she knows I hate 'em. I hate the smell of 'em, and when I stand about in 'em—and I seem to spend half my life standing about in garages—my back aches till I feel like an "Every picture tells a story" advertisement. Back we had to go the next day, and, of course, the thing wasn't ready. However, we got through the day, calling at the garage, and going

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away and calling back again, and, by the time the thing was finished, it was raining. That was two days of a summer holiday, mind you.

‘I wish I could say the rest of the holiday was an improvement, but I don’t want to tell a lie. It wasn’t. First, my wife remembered she had never seen Newquay, and she didn’t want to leave Cornwall without seeing Newquay. Then, on the way home from Newquay, she thought she noticed a queer ticking noise in the engine. That, of course, meant another day in the stink of that Falmouth garage. Then there was some other place about a million miles from Mullion Cove, and something did seem really to go wrong with the steering-wheel, and that meant back to Falmouth again—my back still aches when I think of it. Then there was somewhere else, till the last day of the holiday, when I put my foot down and said: “I’m going to spend the day at Mullion Cove.” Do you know that my wife insisted that we must have the car gone over with a grease-gun or something so as to get ready for the journey to London. I suppose I’m a fool, but off to the garage at Falmouth again, though I swore I would get back again in time to see the Cove after dinner. And when we had got back, just as if to spite me, it was raining cats and dogs. And it was doing the same the next morning when we left.

‘But that’s not why I hate Mullion. I hate

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Mullion because I came back here a week ago to see the Cove that I hadn't seen in the summer, and it has been blowing and raining Old Harry ever since, except two middling days that we spent at the garage at Falmouth. I haven't seen the Cove yet. There's no pleasure in going out in weather like this. And it's getting worse.'

His wife came into the room and said : ' The waiter says there's a wonderful sea in the Cove. He says the waves are breaking right over the pier.' ' Oh, he does, does he ? ' said the old gentleman, looking viciously at her over his spectacles. ' Well, go back to the waiter and say to him with my compliments, " Let 'em ! " '

## VI. The Greyhound



IT is a little over a year and a half since a friend sent me the news that he had a greyhound which he would like me to have and to run in the electric-hare races which were then being organized at the Grand Cynodrome. I had never till then even patted a greyhound on the head, and, indeed, I did not much care for dogs, having always held the cat to be the superior, as well as the less dangerous, animal. One is easily tempted, however, by the prospect of a new experience, and it amused me to think of myself as a greyhound-owner ; so I accepted the gift. Resolved to play the part as well as possible, I hastened off to the kennels at the Cynodrome to be introduced to my dog and take counsel with my trainer. The trainer brought out the dog on a lead—a rather heavy-looking brindled animal, with a kindly expression in his eye, but looking as though he would rather walk than run, and rather lie down than walk. There was something grey and grandfatherly in his appearance. ‘Looks as if he was a bit past it,’ said the trainer. ‘We must see if we can get some of the winter beef off him.’ The dog—Early Frost was his name—looked up and wagged his tail cheerfully. You couldn’t help liking him. He was no beauty,

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compared with the other dogs I was shown in the kennels, but he was infinitely good-natured.

The night came on which he was to have his first race. Bugles were blown, and six dogs were led out by attendants in white coats into the immense Cynodrome, while a thousand bookmakers shouted their offers of six to one against Early Frost to sixty thousand spectators. I confess my heart beat fast as I watched Early Frost padding beside his attendant in the parade round the track. He did not look much of a dog, but then none of the dogs entered for this particular race was supposed to be much of a dog. The six dogs had their coats removed and were caged in the starting-traps. The electric hare was released and sped, roaring, round the track, emitting lightning-flashes. As it swept past the traps the six dogs sprang out after it, with Early Frost two lengths behind. By the time the first turn was reached the electric hare was being pursued by five dogs, and five dogs were being pursued by Early Frost. He fell further and further behind till at last his object seemed to be not to catch up with the other dogs but merely to keep them in sight. This he made a desperate effort to do. Long after the other dogs had passed the post, Early Frost battled on miles away down the straight, tottering, lurching, but undefeated in spirit. Then, just as he reached the post, a tremor passed over him ; his hind legs went



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from under him ; and he rolled slowly over on his side on the grass. His attendant tried to make him get up, but in vain ; and, in the end, to my infinite humiliation, he took him up in his arms and carried him off the field like a baby.

For the moment I feared that the dog was dead ; but, when I found that nothing was the matter with him except that he was a fat old dog past racing, alarm gave place to indignation, and I taxed my friend with treachery in having made me ridiculous by giving me a dog that, contrary to all precedent, lay down on the racing track and had to be carried to his kennel. I felt none the less ridiculous when photographers began sending me invitations to give them sittings for series of photographs to be called 'Famous Greyhound-Owners.' One newspaper having printed 'Mrs.' instead of 'Mr.' before my name in its list of starters and owners, my wife also received an invitation to be photographed free in a Famous Greyhound-Owners series. A few days later my friend wrote apologizing, and told me that he had got another dog for me—a young dog, called Lucky Luckybag, which had just come from Ireland and had done well in a trial. I was superstitious enough to be attracted by the name, and, when I read in one of the expert articles about dog-racing in the newspapers that 'Mr. Y. has shown good judgment in his purchase of the promising Lucky Luckybag,' I

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became a new man under the flattery and began to be excited with strange hopes.

What bliss it was to go to the Cynodrome on the night of his first race, and to hear all the bookmakers shouting the name of Lucky Luckybag ! He was the favourite, and nearly everybody was backing him. Bookmakers, their faces like angry moons with bulging eyes, were howling 'Five to two, Lucky Luckybag,' and it was music in my ears. There was a little twinge at my heart as I thought : 'How awful if all these people lose their money !' I had a torturing sense of responsibility, but at the same time a delicious hope of victory. Lucky Luckybag looked such a merry little fellow, wagging his tail as he approached the traps. You who have never owned a greyhound cannot measure the longing that fills the breast of a new owner on such an occasion, and the tremulous excitement that transforms a middle-aged quietist into a gesticulating and shouting fanatic as his dog sweeps out of the trap and races nose to nose with other dogs in the wake of the uncatchable hare. Alas ! longing, gesticulating, and frenzied shouting were in vain. Lucky Luckybag was fifth of the six dogs at the end of the race. I was grateful to him for not being sixth and for not collapsing on the field, but I thought ironical thoughts about those who had given him his name.

Do not rush to conclusions, however. Lucky

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Luckybag won his next race, and ran it in a way that suggested that he would win more. And he very nearly did. Unfortunately, he always ran a yard or two wide at the turns, and was never able to make up enough of the lost ground after this to win more than a second prize. By the end of the season his record was one first prize and two seconds, and the trainer assured me that, if he could be cured of his habit of running wide at the turns, he was a dog of considerable possibilities.

Lucky Luckybag, having spent some months in winter quarters, returned to the Cynodrome at the beginning of the next season, and the trainer sent glowing reports of his progress. Racing was resumed, and I expected every day to get the usual announcement that Lucky Luckybag would run in a race on such-and-such a night. Week followed week, however, and no announcement came. Then I received a letter from the trainer saying that the dog had developed a bad habit of tearing his kennel to pieces at night, and asking me to go and see him. I went to the Cynodrome, and, instead of the bright little tail-wagger of a few months before, I found a trembling animal, with a cut nose, and all manner of self-inflicted wounds on his legs and body. The trainer said he had done all that he could and that there was no hope for the dog unless I took him away and looked after him till he had got over his claustrophobia

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(though he did not call the dog's nervousness by that name). He said that he should be allowed to run about a garden, be looked after by a veterinary surgeon, and be given plenty of exercise. And that was how I came to have a greyhound in the house.

The greyhound seemed extraordinarily happy in his new surroundings. He treated the house as his own, walked up the stairs and into the bedrooms, chased the cat out of the window, leaped up at one's hand and face to challenge one to a race in the garden, and generally behaved as if he were under the impression that human beings had nothing to do but make houses fit for greyhounds to live in. And, indeed, while he remained, I was little better than his slave. I spent the next fortnight taking him to and from the veterinary surgeon's—who discovered that he was blind of an eye—and stealing out with him for long walks after night had fallen. I did not enjoy these walks. I cannot walk as far or as fast as a greyhound, and, apart from that, the presence of a racing greyhound towing me along the pavements made me feel, especially by daylight, the veriest impostor. Queer characters used to stop me in the street, and talk about dogs, asking me questions about Lucky Luckybag's pedigree, which I could never remember, and offering to sell me the pups of dogs I had never heard of. Night after night I sought the quietest and

## The Greyhound

darkest streets, with Lucky Luckybag straining at the lead every time a cat appeared. I do not think I had ever walked so far in my life. But Lucky Luckybag was getting better, and his appetite was the appetite of a young lion.

Then from sheer exhaustion I boarded him out for a couple of months, then tried him at the Cynodrome again, where he again tore his kennel to pieces so that he had to be removed, then boarded him out once more, still in the hope that he would ultimately be able to return to racing. The other day, however, when a return to the Cynodrome was followed by a return of the old symptoms, I resolved for economy's sake to resign from the racing-track and to have the dog home to pass the remainder of his years in fireside idleness. My nieces promised they would take him out for walks. The cook promised she would take him out for walks. We all said we should take him out for walks. . . .

There was never a friendlier dog. He was all tail-waggings and readiness for romps. When he went down to his bed in the kitchen on the night of his return, we felt that at last we had a real mascot in the house, a luck-bringer. . . .

About two in the morning I was awakened from my sleep by a noise like that of a burglary. There was a scratching at windows, a sound as of a door being forced open, a crash as of something knocked over in the dark. I said to

## It's a Fine World

myself, 'It's only Lucky Luckybag,' and turned over on my side to sleep. Five minutes later a crash of tumbling trays startled me into wakefulness again, and I sat up and listened. The trays went on crashing. I crept down the stairs in a little trepidation, since I did not know what to do should the dog have gone mad. I opened the kitchen door and turned on the light. The dog came up to me with wagging tail and a Little-Jack-Horner expression in his eye as I surveyed the torn linoleum, the scratched paint and the trays on the floor. 'Good dog,' I said, and patted him on the head. He seemed a model dog when I left him, and I felt really annoyed when about an hour later a worse crash than ever awoke me. It was as though burglars were throwing plates at each other and tumbling over each other in the kitchen. I felt sleepy and angry, and said to myself: 'Let him tear the kitchen to pieces if he wants to.' Ten minutes later I said to myself: 'But he *is* tearing the kitchen to pieces,' and strode downstairs to give him a talking-to. He looked so happy to see me, however, so gentle and kind, that there was nothing to do but to give him something to eat and soothe him to sleep again.

Alas ! for the ingratitude of dogs. I was just struggling into my third sleep when the uproar in the kitchen broke out again, as if the house had been in the possession of a poltergeist.

## The Greyhound

This time he had destroyed the linoleum for good. This time he *had* made wreckage of the dishes, and it astonished me, in spite of his mild and smiling face, that he had left a chair or a picture whole in the room. I was tempted to open the front door and to let him run away and find a house he liked better. I was determined at least to give him away in the morning. I gave him some more food and soothed him to sleep again and then, by a happy thought, left the light on in the hope that he would feel less nervous in the dark. And, after that, he slept.

As for me, I was but a jaded wreck when, the first thing in the morning, I went to the telephone. 'Are you really sure you would like him as a present?' I asked. He said that he was. 'When can you come for him?' I asked. He said the same afternoon. 'I'm very fond of that dog,' he said. 'Nobody could help liking him,' I replied, and indeed I had never been so fond of an animal of which I wished to be rid.

I may say that in the meantime I had discovered that 'Lucky Luckybag' was only the dog's racing name, and that his real name was Jack. This is only a trifle, but, if I had been sure the dog was a mascot. . . .

As it is, I am no longer a Famous Greyhound-Owner, and the cat is much happier.



## VII. On Going to Live in America ∞

A CURIOUS incident took place at a woman's meeting at Islington Chapel. The minister, the Rev. Joseph Shepherd, announced that he had received a letter from a rich man in America who wished to marry an English wife, and who, if he could obtain one, was willing to provide her with a luxurious home and an income of £3,000 a year. The American, he explained, asked but little of his prospective wife in return. 'He did not mind if the bloom of youth had left her cheeks. Any respectable woman, even though she might perhaps be approaching middle-age, who was willing to go to his country, might make a suitable partner.' The only conditions he made were that the woman should be English and that she should not be an adventuress, an adventuress presumably being a woman who would marry a man for his money.

The women of Islington were present in great numbers to listen to the rich man's offer. The young, the middle-aged and the old were there, the rich and the poor. 'Many of the women in that crowded audience,' according to Mr. Shepherd, 'knew what it was to want for food'; but 'not one stirred, or indeed showed the slightest interest.' They threw the rich



## On Going to Live in America

man's offer back in his teeth. 'We appreciate his offer,' was the general tone of their comments, 'and the tribute that he pays us . . . but we would sooner be poor in Islington than millionaires' wives in America.'

Occasionally we hear pessimists talking of the ever-increasing worship of riches. Money, we are told, is the modern god. With money you can buy love, pleasure, power, and everything the heart desires short of Paradise. With money you can buy anything from a title to a man's soul. With money you can cut a prouder figure in the world than the greatest poet or the greatest philosopher. It is clear that those who make these gloomy and facile generalizations have never considered Islington. If they had, they would have discovered that there is at least one English parish even to-day which is not to be corrupted by gold. There the mercenary spirit of the times sings its siren songs in vain. I do not suggest that the women of Islington are absolutely indifferent to money—that they never fill in the free-insurance coupons in the newspapers or enter for competitions in which the prize is £5 a week for life. Even an ascetic philosopher might do these things. It is one thing to accept money for nothing, and another thing to be open to a bribe. What the women of Islington have shown in no uncertain manner is that they cannot be bribed—that they cannot be bribed

## It's a Fine World

at least to leave Islington for America. Their statement on the matter is perfectly clear. 'We would sooner be poor in Islington than millionaires' wives in America.' It is either the least adventurous or the most heroic utterance that has been heard for a long time.

Cynics may attribute it to the fact that the women of Islington were not quite certain whether the offer was genuine. But the minister of the chapel had told them that the rich man had enclosed references with his letter which bore witness to its genuineness. Others may say that the women were held back by shame from accepting the offer too greedily in public. After all, if a hundred hands had been held up at the meeting, there would have been ninety-nine women left humiliated by the memory that they had publicly offered to sell themselves for £3,000 a year to a man who for all they knew might be the maddest, worst, and ugliest man on earth—had offered and been rejected. Even in Islington, it may be, at least one woman might be found who, if the proposal had been made to her in private, would have considered it more favourably. £3,000 a year is a good round sum, and many a woman has married for less a husband who on other grounds was no catch. At the same time, I doubt whether even outside Islington the majority of unmarried women could be bribed by the largest cheque to marry a man of whom they knew nothing

## On Going to Live in America

except that he was willing to marry almost anybody except an adventuress. They would justifiably suspect something odd—something uncannily odd—in a man who with so much money was unable to secure a wife in the ordinary way and who ordered a wife as you might order a melon from the greengrocer's. The cinema, it must be remembered, has revived the belief in the importance of love, and, as a result, women to-day are too romantic to be wooed *en masse* by an anonymous letter read from a Nonconformist pulpit. Not in this fashion do the heroes of the film win their brides. Not yet, even in this plutocratic age, have we reached a point at which a rich man in his office can ring for a secretary and say : ' Order me a wife.' Love counts for more than money with frequenters of the cinema, and, in four cases out of five, I fancy, a woman will not marry a man unless he at least pretends to love her.

I know that, when I try to put myself in the place of the women of Islington, I feel that I should have behaved in much the same way. Imagine, for example, a crowded meeting ' for men only ' at Whitefield's Tabernacle, and myself, still young and unmarried, present. In the pulpit stands a venerable minister of the Gospel, reading an anonymous letter from a rich American lady who offers to marry anybody in the audience and to endow him with £3,000

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a year for life. Much as I love gold, would my heart beat faster at the proposal? Should I leap to my feet, and make my fortune at a spring? Or should I keep to my seat and murmur to myself: 'I would sooner be poor in Hampstead than a millionairess's husband in America'? Honestly, I believe I should keep to my seat, and I should not count this to myself for virtue. It is not that I am untouched by the common ambitions or that I have a deep-rooted dislike of millionairesses. But somehow or other I have always been enough of an idealist to hate the notion of marrying a rich woman without having previously seen either her or her photograph. The realist may tell me that I am finicky, that money counts, that no man can in fairness expect more of a wife than that she will provide him with £3,000 a year. I confess, however, that, even if the money were doubled and then trebled and then decupled, I should still feel no temptation. Not if it meant living in America.

That may be what the women of Islington felt. Even those of them who would have had no objection to being millionaires' wives, could not endure the thought of being millionaires' wives in America. This must not be put down to anti-American bias. The women of Islington and I respect Americans. We are glad they won the Battle of Saratoga. We regard George Washington and Abraham Lincoln as the salt

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of the earth. We like the Americans we know, and our only grievance against the Americans we don't know is that we owe them money. But somehow, when we think of Hampstead and of Islington, it is difficult to believe that places as good exist in any other continent. Who would willingly exchange the quiet of these old-world streets for the bustle and roar of American cities, with bootleggers firing machine-guns at each other during daylight hours? Who would abandon the easy-going way of life of the island races for the frenzied rush for money that is characteristic of America? Who would resign the security of an English public-house for the perilous round of the New York 'speak-easies'? Who would give up cricket for baseball? Who would voluntarily settle in a country in which the birds are different from the birds one knows and the birds' names are even more different than the birds? And then there is the weather. There is one glorious thing about the English weather: it is never too cold—(except this year)—never too wet—(except last year)—and never too hot—(except the year before). If there are grey skies, we don't mind grey skies; we know that they cannot last beyond the end of the summer. This, indeed, is the perfect climate. As for the American weather, we never see a reference to it in the papers that does not tell us of tornados, cyclones, floods that overwhelm towns, heat-waves in which

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millionaires (and, no doubt, their wives) perish, and worse than Arctic frosts. In America everything is sensational, but nothing in America is more sensational than the weather. That alone, I think, would be sufficient to explain the reluctance of the women of Islington to become millionairesses.

Had it been a rich Italian who invited them to marry him, the answer might have been different. But even then, I fancy, many of them would have shrunk from leaving Islington for Italy for ever. Better, to an Islington woman, is the smoke of Islington than the sunshine of Italy. I share her feelings in this respect. If I am settled in one spot, I do not like to go and live among strangers. In London, since I live north of the river, I should not like to live south of the river. Living in Hampstead, I should not like to be transplanted even so far as Highgate. There are very few parts of the world in which I could imagine myself being so happy as where I am. There is one, but I am not sure where it is. Certainly it is in no distant country. Were I starving, or near it, I should, no doubt, be willing to go to China or the South Seas for even a small sum of money. But, while I can make ends almost meet, I should not go and live among strangers though my salary were trebled. That is why I am convinced that it is true that it is better to be poor in Islington than a millionaire's wife in

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America. But only for an Islington woman. If you are an American woman, it is better to be a millionaire's wife in America than poor in Islington. That is one of the mysteries of patriotism.

## VIII. The Goddess ~ ~ ~ ~

A FAMOUS actress died recently, and it was easy to see from the comments in the newspapers that many now middle-aged men had been her adoring slaves in their youth. An odd thing about these comments was, however, that most of the writers seemed to assume that goddesses of the stage have all but vanished in these days of the cinema, and that the theatre is no longer the haunt of adoring youth that it used to be. I fancy that what has really happened is that the ex-adorers have grown older, not that the goddesses have ceased to be worshipped. So long as the theatre exists, it is difficult to believe that it will cease to be the temple of young idolators. To fall in love with an actress at some time of one's life is so natural as to be almost inevitable.

There are, of course, degrees in the strength and subtlety of the passion. There are some people who are so much in love with the stage itself that they are ready to worship almost anybody who appears on it, down to the little housemaid with the three-line part. They study the programme with such avidity that they can repeat months afterwards the names of the most insignificant actors and actresses who took part in any play they have seen. I was myself



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for a time of that disposition. To see an actor walking along the street was an exciting event. If you had told me : ' There's the chap who played Rosencranz last night going into the tobacconist's,' I should have stared after him with a Cortesian awe. It was as if his very presence in the streets increased the dignity of my native city. It would have gratified me more to shake hands with him than with the Moderator of the General Assembly.

This all-embracing passion for the stage, however, is an entirely different thing from the concentrated devotion fixed on a single actor or actress. And it is only a few actors and actresses who have the power of converting an indiscriminate bewitchment with the theatre into an ecstasy of personal adoration. Even after personal adoration begins, it is true, one still continues, if not to idealize all actors and actresses, at least to have a particularly warm affection for all the members of the company with whom the adored actress is playing. They must all, one feels, share one's own adoration of her, and any one who adores her is one's friend. A scrap of gossip telling how popular she is with the chorus-girls moves the worshipper like a tale of supreme nobility of character. But, indeed, the beauty of her character is as indubitable as the beauty of her face. She may sing all kinds of trivial words, such as ' I wink at the boys on the sly,' but in the imagination

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these become touched with a strange and almost sacred loveliness and they haunt the memory as exquisitely as 'Sabrina fair' itself.

Of all forms of love, this, I think, is the most disinterested. The lover is content to love without hope that he will ever even exchange a word with the adored one or shake her by the hand. Night after night he will climb up to the gallery—I went six times in a week to one musical comedy—and wait in the darkness for the sudden entrance from the wings, more glorious than a sunrise, and the entrancing singing of the always entrancing song, 'There was once a merry monkey in a cosy little cage,' the chorus ending, as the divine finger is shaken at the gallery, 'Now, who *was* that little monkey? Was it you?' Strange the thrill produced by that shaken finger and by the glance that accompanied it! For every worshipper in the house felt that that glance was somehow—no doubt, by accident—directed at himself, and he was even embarrassed by being singled out in this fashion in the presence of so many other people. Luckily, the glance did not last long, and the dance began, in which the most beautiful woman on earth gave the most delicious imitation of the antics of a monkey. Who could have failed to encore such a heavenly song and dance? Who could have failed to encore it twice, thrice, four times and even after that to continue applauding

## The Goddess

in the wish that the song would go on for ever.

On the occasion of the first visit, perhaps, one is inclined to be impatient of the turns that occupy the stage between one of her appearances and the next. When one has seen the musical comedy again and again, however, one begins under her spell to discover unexpected beauties in the other parts of the performance. The broken English of the Frenchman seems extraordinarily witty : ' the green-eyed lobster ', as a description of jealousy, grows upon one curiously with repetition. Even the sentimental songs that had always seemed to unadoring ears to be the bane of musical comedy are seen here to be of noble quality.

Where'er you are, the sun is always shining,  
Where'er you are, the skies are always blue—

yes, as the tenor sings them, they do express the passion of love as it was never expressed in musical comedy before. The whole musical comedy, indeed, is, as one's neighbour (also under the spell) confesses, a work of art quite unlike all the other pieces of the kind one has seen. It has a well-constructed and ingenious plot. The music is the best since Sullivan. The dialogue is really witty. And, as for the company, there was never such a company before in the history of musical comedy.

Then home with the book of words—if not

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the holy writ of beauty, at least a book to be preferred to it at this rapturous hour. To re-read the songs was to live those precious moments over again. 'There was once a merry monkey'—how lovely her smile was as she sang it !

Where'er you are, the sun is always shining,  
Where'er you are, the skies are always blue—

Well, perhaps it was the music rather than the words that made it so poignant, so expressive of heartache. But then to the lover all words seem to fall below the height of his own unparalleled passion. That is why he turns aside even from Shakespeare and writes poetry himself. Not at the time, perhaps—not just after returning from the theatre—but weeks afterwards, when the beloved in the course of her provincial tour has arrived at Glasgow.

It is difficult to do any work during the week of her visit. It is necessary to be in the streets as much as possible lest at any moment she should drive or walk by. A friend—enviable and undeserving man—has related how she had stopped him in the street to inquire the way to the Post Office. Such an event might happen to oneself, though to a reasonable mind it might seem unlikely that an actress would keep on asking the way to the Post Office when once she had discovered it. But love does not know reason, and the divine possibility of such

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an encounter lit up the streets like a Paradise. Her lovely smile as she would ask her way could be imagined, the thrilled voice of the worshipper as he would reply : ' The Post Office ? Oh, it's the first turn to the left '—and then ? Parting for ever ? Or the beginning of a great friendship ? But the glorious accident never happened. Still, she did drive past one day when a worshipper was there to see her and to stand and stare after her till she was out of sight. But how melancholy she looked ! How wistful ! How pale ! How unlike the happy, laughing goddess who had sung ' There was once a merry monkey ' in the theatre !

It is a terrific enough experience to love a goddess who appears to be perfectly happy. But it is as nothing compared with the experience of loving a goddess who seems for some unaccountable reason to be miserable. How heroic her laughter on the stage now seems ! How one longs (metaphorically, it may be) to give one's life for her ! Beautiful as the words of ' There was once a merry monkey ' had seemed before, they are now informed with a new and tragic beauty. The light-heartedness of the theatre is seen to be heroic. . . . Then the goddess disappears, and the city returns to darkness. Her photograph, to be sure, is on the mantelpiece ; and at the end of every week the *Stage* arrives with an account of her appearance at Liverpool or Bradford, or whatever

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town she has reached in her provincial tour. Only those who have loved can know the happiness to be found in reading the provincial reports in a stage newspaper. There is a disinterested leap of the heart at sight of the words : ' Cora Bandini brought the house down with her song " There was once a merry monkey ", ' or ' Cora Bandini, with her clever singing and dancing, established herself as a warm favourite ', or ' A large audience encored Cora Bandini's songs again and again. ' When you can read sentences like that about anybody except yourself with rapture, believe me, you are in love. . . .

The letter was posted, but it was never answered. It contained a poem of which any tolerable poet would no doubt be ashamed, and an offer not only of devotion but of help, should she ever need it. Not that there would have been any use in her sending for help in money (for there was no money) or for the help of a strong right arm (for there was no strong right arm). But help was offered, just plain, vague, honest help, in whatever part of the world she happened to be when she needed it. Perhaps the offer was too vague to be thought worth acknowledging. But that was not the reason why love dwindled. It simply and mysteriously dwindled. It lasted, I suppose, for a year, but at the end of about a year the *Stage* lost one of its most ardent and assiduous subscribers.

## IX. Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerchwyrn- drobwlllandysiliogogoch ∞ ∞

THAT, according to a Welsh Member of Parliament, is not the right way to spell it. Two syllables of the name, he told the House of Commons, are here placed in the wrong order. Perhaps it was the misspelling that made the House so hilarious, when the name of the village was mentioned in a question addressed to the Postmaster-General. Every reader of *Punch* knows how funny even the most trifling mistake in spelling can be. At the same time, I suspect that in its correct spelling the name of Llanfairpwllgwyn, etc., would have seemed equally comic to Englishmen, and possibly to Welshmen. It is a dachshund of a word elongated almost to infinity, and even an ordinary dachshund is funny.

It is difficult to say at what point a word begins to grow funny because of its length. Remove one letter after another from the end of this Welsh word, and at what point will it cease to be funny? Take away the entire second half of the word, and it will still be ridiculous. It is a word that you could not possibly work into a sonnet, nor could you begin a Welsh *Deserted Village* with the line

Sweet Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerchwyndrobwllland-  
ysiliogogoch, loveliest village of the plain.



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The Welsh are a race of bards, but I doubt if they have ever invented a metre which could contain the name of this village, the postmaster of which has given notice of his resignation. Even in free verse the word would look a little absurd. It scarcely looks right in a page of common prose.

The Welsh, I fancy, have preserved it mainly as an attraction for tourists. I am sure that no Welshman talking to another Welshman ever rolls out that horrid and disordered alphabet. No nation could survive which in its ordinary speech gave places names like that. In these days of keen competition, it is the race with the short words that wins. Names of undue length are an obstruction to business whether on the railways, in the post office, or in the houses of commerce. If you were ordering bulbs, and you were hesitating whether to order them from Tring or Llanfair, etc., etc., you would end by ordering them from Tring merely in order to save trouble.

Presumably, then, it was a Welsh humorist who invented the name in order to give visitors something to wonder at. If I remember right, when I was in Wales many years ago, you could buy the name on a sheet of paper for a penny, and, if you were a stranger, you did. It was a curiosity, worthy of being added to the seven wonders of the world. It was more astonishing than Snowdon and more difficult to master.



## Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerch, etc.

It was Wales, too, in an ingratiatingly comic mood—Wales all but Rabelaisian. Presumably, it is the longest word in the world, and the longest word in the world is in its own way as interesting as the longest river in the world or the highest mountain or the largest lake. If you were told that the tallest tree in the world was in a Surrey wood, you would drive out to see it with the liveliest curiosity. You and thousands of others would stand gazing at it simply through a passion for the superlative. The superlatively big and the superlatively little—each of them stirs us into wonder. We should admire equally a Bible so huge that one had to climb a ladder to reach the top of the page, and a Bible so tiny that it could be fitted into a thimble. We are all victims of the love of the odd, and many people would go farther to see a man ten feet high or with three eyes than to talk with Socrates.

Yet always in the end we return for repose to the normal. An excess of excess wearies us. If all places had names like that of the unpronounceable Welsh village, we should be bored and not interested. The truth is, the name has no virtue but uniqueness. It is, as Johnson said of Gray, merely dull in a new way. It is as though a painter exhibited a picture which had no claim on our interest except that it was the largest picture, or the smallest picture, in the world. We might go to see it

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once, but not twice. We cannot say exactly what is the right size for a picture, but we know that there are limits of size in both directions beyond which a painter cannot go without peril of freakishness. It is the same with books. Some years ago writers discussed the question, 'What is the right length for a novel?' and many people thought the question ridiculous. But it would have been ridiculous only if it had implied that an exact length could be discovered to which all novels should be expected to conform. In point of fact, it is clear that, in regard to the length of his novels, the novelist is bound by rules, however impossible these rules may be to formulate. It is safe to lay it down as a principle that no novel may be as long as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or as short as an ordinary postcard. At what point excessive length or excessive brevity begins, however, it is impossible to determine. Many people thought, probably rightly, that the novel in the 'nineties was becoming too short. Many people think, probably rightly, that the novel to-day is becoming too long again.

Even in our sentences we are bound by rules that forbid alike excessive length and excessive brevity. If a newspaper were written in sentences each of which ran to a column, I doubt if it would have a single subscriber

## Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerch, etc.

after the first number. If it were written in sentences none of which was more than three words long, it would be scarcely less tedious. The eye is comfortable only in travelling over normal stretches of words. It is as easily bewildered and confused by too many full-stops as by too few. Somewhere, but indefinable, are the limits of the normal, and between these exists all excellent writing.

And, as with sentences, so with words. At least, it is obvious that words cannot be too long without exciting the ridicule of ordinary human beings. I have heard it said that the longest word in the English language is 'dis-establishmentarianism', but I doubt if this is true. I am sure the vocabulary of science contains worse examples of multilateralism. If the jargon of science has often been ridiculed by comic writers, it is because men of science have been given to the use of words so long as to be meaningless to the ordinary eye. What can an ordinary man make of such a sentence (written by a botanist) as : 'The hydroid of a Pteridophyte or of a Phanerogram is characteristically a dead, usually elongated cell containing air and water, and either thin-walled with lignified (woody) spiral, or annular, thickenings, or with thick lignified walls, incompletely perforated by pits (usually bordered pits) of various shapes, e.g. the pits may be separated by a network of thickenings when the tracheid is *reticulate*

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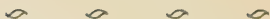
or they may be transversely elongated and separated by bars of thickening like the rungs of a ladder (sculariform thickenings)' ? What is to be made of 'microsporophylls' and 'macrosporophylls', of the 'parenchymatous cortex' or a 'hydrom-stereom strand somewhat like that of the rhizome in other Polytrichaceae' ? Such a battery of long words stuns all but the determined student, and terrifies common men from approaching the domain of science. It is possible that a private jargon is necessary for every science, and that this is no more essentially ridiculous than foreign words, which frequently seem absurd to those who do not understand them. At the same time, I am sure the philosophers and men of science have used a great many more long words, and have used them oftener, than was necessary. They are like men taking pride in a national language. There is a vanity of language that expresses itself in polysyllables. Every science has its Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerchwyrndrobwllllandysiliogogogochs and is proud of them.

And the curious thing is that these long words seldom mean anything half so important as ordinary people express in words of four or five letters. You can spell 'man' in three letters, but, if you want to name some invisible microbe lurking under his finger-nail, you will probably need a word containing twenty. Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerchwyrndrobwllllandysiliogogogoch,

## Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerch, etc.

which is an obscure village, has a name containing fifty-seven letters : Rome, a great and ancient city, is content with a name containing four. There is a moral in this. I wish I knew what it is.

## X. The Slave



THE church-goers were coming out from the Sunday-morning service. I caught sight of a friend of mine among them, an eminent writer, approaching the gate with grave mien in a very beautiful top-hat. His smile, when he saw me, was still touched with the gravity of the occasion, and I was a little surprised when, after a few questions and answers, he took me by the elbow and said : ‘ What do you say to something to drink ? ’ I assured him that it was useless to say anything to something to drink ; that the licensing laws of England made it impossible ; that, in short ‘ they ’ did not open for another hour. ‘ Never mind,’ he said, ‘ I know a place ’ ; and, before I quite knew what was happening to me, I was sitting in a taxicab, bound for an unknown destination.

There was an air of peace over everything as we drove through the streets. The Sabbath sun was shining from a clear sky ; had the place been anywhere but London and had the month been any but July, the birds would have been singing. ‘ There are not many great preachers left,’ said my friend, looking wistfully up at the sky, ‘ but I think Canon ——’s one of them. Don’t you think so ? Do you know, I never

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hear him preach without making up my mind there and then to lead a better life. Funny the effect some parsons have on you. You go into most churches, and you come out chilled, disappointed, empty. The hungry sheep look up and are not fed. You might as well have stayed away. But Canon —— is different. He seems somehow to get a grip of you and to compel you to lead a better life whether you want to or not. I've never known sermons to have had such a powerful effect on me.' 'And was he preaching to-day?' I asked. 'He was,' said my friend, his eyes bright with remembrance; 'he preached one of the finest sermons I ever heard. I wish you had been there. The sermon was a plea for a new sense of spiritual values in the modern world. He lashed out in fine style against all this craze for pleasure among the young. Self-indulgence everywhere, self-denial nowhere. I liked one of his phrases, "a robust life of self-discipline". That, my dear Y., is what the world needs to-day. Oh, here's the place,' he said, in a different tone of voice, as the taxi slowed to a stop. And we got out, and went in.

The room to which he took me was a small room in which he works, or at least tells his wife that he works, on weekdays. It contained, I noticed, a cupboard, and from the cupboard he produced a bottle. 'Say when,' he bade me, but, when I had spoken, he

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continued pouring, observing : ' You're not so young as you once were, Y. These thimblefuls are no good to a man of your age.' And, a minute later, we were both sitting back in extraordinarily large armchairs with glasses of whisky almost as large on the table between us. He held his glass up to catch the light—the innocent Sabbath-morning light that was streaming through the window—and shook his head at it reproachfully. ' I ought not to be drinking this,' he said. ' No,' I agreed ; ' it certainly doesn't fit in with the "robust life of self-discipline ".' ' That's not what I meant,' he said. ' But, quite seriously, I saw my doctor lately, and he warned me that, if I didn't want to become a chronic dyspeptic, I must give up stewed fruit and milk puddings and alcohol in all its forms.' ' And you gave up milk puddings ? ' I asked him. ' Yes,' he said, with a look of modest pride, ' I gave up milk puddings.' ' And stewed fruit ? ' ' Yes,' he said, in a more regretful tone, ' even stewed fruit.' ' But not,' I pressed him, ' alcohol in all its forms ? ' He inhaled a deep breath charged with cigarette smoke, and shook his head dolefully for an answer. ' Well,' said I, wishing to comfort him—for his noble features had now become steeped in melancholy—' what of it ? I am in exactly the same case. I, too, have a doctor who threatens me with chronic dyspepsia if I don't give up milk puddings, stewed fruit, and



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alcohol in all its forms.' 'And you haven't given them up?' asked my friend, brightening. 'On the contrary,' I assured him, 'I haven't touched a milk pudding for three months.' 'But stewed fruit?' he asked me, hopefully. 'No,' I said; 'like you I gave up both milk puddings and stewed fruit absolutely, and I think we ought both to feel proud of ourselves.' 'You mean,' he said, not daring to hope too much, 'that you haven't yet even tried to give up alcohol in all its forms?' 'Not in all its forms,' I agreed, not wishing to dishearten him—for I am really a slave to my doctor and do nearly everything he orders me to do. 'In most of its forms, yes. But in all its forms, no. This, for instance,' said I, taking up the glass he had given me. 'I oughtn't to be drinking this, but I am drinking it, though,' I reminded him, 'I shouldn't be drinking even this if Canon ——'s sermon had lasted five minutes longer.' 'So we're both in the same boat,' said my friend, cheering up. I nodded sorrowfully. With a radiant expression he took up his glass and cried: 'Here's to the confusion of the medical profession.' And, though I love and honour the medical profession, I also, for courtesy's sake, took up my glass and drank.

Nothing was too good for me after that. I was invited to lunch. As I could not go to lunch, I was offered a cigar out of a perfectly wonderful box of cigars that had been given to

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my friend by an American millionaire. 'No, thanks,' I said, 'I'd honestly rather have a Virginian cigarette.' My friend's face fell again at that. 'I wish to heaven,' he said gloomily, 'I could give up cigarettes. My doctor tells me that they're one of the chief causes of blood pressure, and that I'll take ten years off my life if I don't stop them.' 'But do you find they do you any harm?' I asked. 'Harm!' he cried bitterly; 'don't you know what it is to wake up with a morning cough, and to have a chronic sore throat, and to be unable to sleep because of the beating of your heart?' 'But surely,' I suggested, 'if you feel these appalling symptoms, it would cause you less suffering to give up smoking than to continue it.' 'So I thought,' he confessed, 'and I did my best to stop it. For a month, I sucked peppermint drops, because I had been told that that was an easy way to give up smoking. But you know how people look at you if you've been sucking peppermint drops. So I gave up sucking peppermint drops.' 'You should have sucked acid drops instead,' I said. 'Acid drops—are they good?' he asked eagerly. 'Good, I have been told, for that purpose,' I replied. 'I must get some,' he said; 'do you know the name of a good brand?' 'You don't need a good brand,' I assured him; 'the more virulent the brand, the better.' 'I'd suck anything short of poison,' he declared, dolefully,

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'if it would help me to give up smoking.' Again a profound pity for him welled up in my heart. 'Look here,' I consoled him, 'you're not unique in being a slave to tobacco. Thousands of us are just the same. I'—I exaggerated manfully—'am just as bad as you.' 'Not really?' he said with a radiant smile; 'you don't smoke forty a day.' 'I smoke fifty'—I piled it on—'or sixty, and sometimes even seventy.' He laughed aloud with joy. 'And you have a morning cough?' he asked. 'Horrific,' I said. 'And palpitation?' he added eagerly. I thought palpitation undignified and replied, 'Only a little.' He looked disappointed, but urged, with a longing look: 'But you have a chronic sore throat?' 'I have had a chronic sore throat since I left school.' 'Good man!' he cried jubilantly; 'have some more whisky.' 'Not another drop,' I replied; 'I must go home and lead a robust life of self-discipline.' 'Ah, Y.,' he said, 'I wish you would come and hear Canon —— some day. That man has changed the world for me.' He took out a cigarette, lit it and inhaled it, and bade me farewell, and, as I shook his hand, I told myself that I had done at least one good deed that day in comforting an erring fellow-mortal.

What was my astonishment a week later, on opening a great London journal, to find an article by my friend in which he represented

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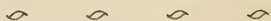
himself as a kind of saintly father confessor and me as a weak-willed monstrosity who had confessed to him my inability to cease smoking seventy cigarettes a day even though my doctor had told me my life depended on my doing so. He called the article 'A Slave to his Senses,' and began, 'There is no fool like a middle-aged fool.' He painted a lurid picture of me, asked what Marcus Aurelius or John Bunyan would have thought of me, and reported that he himself had exhorted me : ' Even on the low ground of pleasure, do you not realize that you lose more than you gain by excessive smoking—that you are no longer able to savour the delicious fragrance of the morning air or the sweet smell of the rose ? ' ' No nose for roses,' was one of his more scornful epigrams. He told of the disgust with which he had heard me speak of my morning cough and chronic sore throat, adding, ' The fellow seemed to take a sniggering pride in what to most of us would seem the just punishment of his putty-souled self-indulgence.' He informed his readers that he had advised me to ' be a man ', and not a worm narcotized by nicotine, to go out on a summer night and look up at the stars, to live, in short (he concluded), ' what Canon —— has called a " life of robust self-discipline " .' And never a word about himself except as a modern St. Francis.

Reader, have you ever been made the subject

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of a sermon in such circumstances ? If you were, what would you do ? I decided that the only thing to do was to tell the truth. And, to the best of my ability, I have done so.

## XI. Shocking



MR. ARNOLD BENNETT, always on the side of the young and the adventurous, expresses the opinion that 'no book by a young author is or can be really original or strong unless it shocks nine people out of ten'. And he adds that he would like to see the institution of a new Book of the Month Club which would choose books guaranteed to shock and which would warn its subscribers in the prospectus 'that they must expect to be shocked by the monthly-arriving parcel'. He guards himself against misunderstanding by explaining : 'I do not mean shocked in the silly narrow sense of shock by audacity of sexual descriptions. Not at all. I use the word in a deeper, larger and nobler sense.' What this deeper, larger and nobler sense is, Mr. Bennett leaves us to guess, but I take it that he believes that, as soon as ideas become accepted, they cease in a measure to be true, and that therefore any young man or woman of genius is bound to approach accepted ideas in the spirit of a heretic. For him, as for Ibsen, the majority is always wrong—a crowd of semi-inanimate fish who must be restored to vitality by the pestering activities of the catfish.

If the artist to-day is the counterpart of the

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prophets and teachers of other centuries, as many people seem to hold, Mr. Bennett is probably right in proclaiming the importance of shocking nine people out of ten—he might even have said nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand. The prophets did not prophesy smooth things. They did their best to make men who lived by any standards but those of Paradise feel extremely uncomfortable. They foretold the doom of the wicked, and among the wicked they included the virtuous whose virtue was merely conventional. They shocked kings and commoners alike by the fury of their threatenings. On the other hand, the prophets did not shock the world a whit more profoundly than the world shocked the prophets. Everybody is shocked by somebody, and, in shocking nine people out of ten, the prophets were only as it were shocking back.

So much in regard to one great branch of shocking literature, if one may use the word 'literature' in a wide sense. So far as one can judge, however, comparatively few of the artists whose work has survived in literature have been in the tradition of Moses and the prophets. Homer sang, not in order to threaten, but in order to delight; and Shakespeare was no revolutionary propagandist in his plays. We find Milton setting forth to justify the ways of God to men in his verse, and Tolstoy making use of fiction as a vehicle for preaching a literal

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acceptance of the Sermon on the Mount. But, though great ideas are implicit in all—at least, in most—great books, not many of the great poets and novelists have aimed primarily at startling their fellow-creatures, after the pattern of the prophets, into leading better lives or into reforming commonwealths and kingdoms. Hence it is clear that, if writers young or old are to shock us, it must be in some other fashion and for other ends than those of the prophets.

But is there any evidence at all that a work by a young author, in order to be original and strong, must shock nine people out of ten? 'Original and strong' are words capable of various interpretations, but Mr. Bennett clearly uses them on the assumption that 'original and strong' books appear fairly numerous and exist in considerable numbers on a level a good deal lower than the plays of Shakespeare and the novels of Balzac. He has, we know, no enthusiasm for Dickens, but he would probably admit that, by common consent, *The Pickwick Papers* is an original and strong work of fiction. Yet so far was it from shocking nine people out of ten, in spite of the presence of Stiggins among its characters, that Dickens immediately became the most popular novelist of his time. Mr. Bennett, I think, regards Dostoevsky as a greater novelist than Dickens, yet I do not think that nine out of ten people found Dostoevsky's first book, *Poor Folk*, shocking.



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Some of the writings of the young Shelley would undoubtedly have shocked the world if the world had read them, but if the young Keats shocked a number of people, it was not by what he wrote, but by belonging to the circle of Leigh Hunt. The history of English poetry, indeed, contains very few instances of young poets who began by shocking their contemporaries. There has been only one Swinburne who was shocking in proportion to his genius. It is true that all great poetry gives us a shock in the same sense in which we feel a delicious shock on entering the sea on a fine day. Poetry that does not continually surprise us into a fresh recognition of beauty is not great poetry. In that sense, Chaucer shocks us when he writes about the daisy, and Henry Vaughan when he writes about immortality. But Mr. Bennett cannot mean that kind of shock. Clearly he means the shock that makes people cry out in disgust or in opposition or in anger. His theory, I imagine, is a theory not of the importance of startling persons like himself, but of the importance of startling the bourgeoisie. And, if that is so, I doubt if he will be able to find much evidence to support it in the history of those who have written the masterpieces of prose and verse from the time of the Greeks to our own day. Some of them shocked people by their early work ; others of them did not. It is a reasonable conclusion that it is as easy to be a

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man of genius without shocking people as it is to shock people without being a man of genius.

Probably the conception of the shock as a good thing in literature was never widespread till the nineteenth century, when the middle classes became more powerful than they had ever been before. Many shocking books had been written before then, but they had been written for people who enjoyed being shocked. It was only in the nineteenth century that it became a fairly common ambition among young writers to shock people who hated being shocked. The literature of the peasants, as seen in folk-tales, is not intended to exasperate but to give pleasure even when pointing a moral; for who would trouble to shock a peasant? The literature of courts and aristocracies, again, has seldom had for its purpose the administration of shocks to peers and princes. It is only the middle classes, with their all but illimitable patience, who have been regarded as the natural butts of young and promising artists. To startle the bourgeois in the arts, in conversation, and even in dress, became a sublime ideal in artistic circles in Paris, and the youth of other capitals became infected with the same ambition. The cry of an outraged bourgeois sounded sweeter in their ears than the applause of the coteries. The praise of the multitude was almost the only

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thing that could have made them lose faith in their genius. Those were days in which it was almost conceivable that a young poet, on finding himself a best-seller, would commit suicide in despair.

It is undeniable that a great deal of fine work was done during the nineteenth century by artists who combined genius with the desire to shock the middle classes. But how much of it was of the highest rank the critical are not yet agreed. Zola shocked Europe, and Oscar Wilde exasperated the respectable in England, but there is little reverberation from those shocks to-day. The book that begins by shocking has apparently no better chance of survival than the book that comes into the world amid loud applause or in almost complete silence. *Robert Elsmere* and *The Woman Who Did* were once shocking books. Yet there is more originality and strength in a song of Campion's than in both of these taken together.

Apart from this, while it may be the natural ambition of the young and spirited to shock a conventional age, the case is different in an age in which conventions are disappearing like melted snow, and no one knows what conventions are to take their place. Conventions have collapsed to such a point to-day that even the middle classes have in great measure ceased to resent being shocked and have begun to enjoy it. A book comparable to *All Quiet on the*

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*Western Front* would have shocked them in the sense of infuriating them thirty years ago ; to-day it shocks them, but with their strong approval. Mr. Shaw—who, unlike most of the great dramatists of the past, is a revolutionary as well as an artist, and who began by shocking the public for revolutionary purposes—is now the idol of thousands of middle-class homes. Almost the only artists who any longer shock the public are those whom the public does not understand and therefore suspects of being humbugs. So it was with the Futurists ; so it is with Mr. Epstein. But, even in regard to Mr. Epstein, the remnants of the bourgeoisie are annoyed not so much by his work itself as by its being thrust upon their notice in public places. And even this they cease to mind after the first few spasms of indignation.

It seems possible, indeed, that with the fading of the old orthodoxies we are now witnessing the gradual evolution of a shock-proof bourgeoisie. It is everywhere becoming increasingly difficult to get prosecuted for saying anything that an artist would wish to say. Novels that would have raised a storm if they had been published in the reign of Queen Victoria are now passed as innocuous by the wives of deans. A new Zola would shock far fewer people to-day, I am sure, than a new Savonarola. A new Savonarola would shock even the shockers. Possibly this is the kind of shock to which

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the young artists of the near future will treat us. Possibly not. It will at least be a Herculean task to-morrow to try to shock nine readers out of ten by any other means.

## XII. On Not Being a Philosopher

‘**H**AVE you read Epictetus lately?’ ‘No, not lately.’ ‘Oh, you ought to read him. Tommy’s been reading him for the first time, and is fearfully excited.’ I caught this scrap of dialogue from the next table in the lounge of a hotel. I became interested, curious, for I had never read Epictetus, though I had often looked at his works on the shelf—perhaps I had even quoted him—and I wondered if here at last was the book of wisdom that I had been looking for at intervals ever since I was at school. Never have I lost my early faith that wisdom is to be found somewhere in a book—to be picked up as easily as a shell from the sand. I desire wisdom as keenly as Solomon did, but it must be wisdom that can be obtained with very little effort—wisdom that can be caught almost by infection. I have no time or energy for the laborious quest of philosophy. I wish the philosophers to perform the laborious quest and, at the end of it, to feed me with the fruits of their labours; just as I get eggs from the farmer, apples from the fruit-grower, medicines from the chemist, so do I expect the philosopher to provide me with wisdom at the cost of a few shillings. That is why at one time I read Emerson and, at another, Marcus

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Aurelius. To read them, I hoped, was to become wise by reading. But I did not become wise. I agreed with them while I read them, but, when I had finished reading, I was still much the same man that I had been before, incapable of concentrating on the things on which they said I should concentrate or of being indifferent to the things to which they said I should be indifferent. Still, I have never lost faith in books, believing that somewhere printed matter exists from which I shall be able to absorb philosophy and strength of character while smoking in an armchair. It was in this mood that I took down Epictetus after hearing the conversation in the hotel lounge.

I read him, I confess, with considerable excitement. He is the kind of philosopher I like, not treating life as if at its finest it were an argument conducted in difficult jargon, but discussing, among other things, how men should behave in the affairs of ordinary life. Also, I agreed with nearly everything he said. Indifference to pain, death, poverty—yes, that is eminently desirable. Not to be troubled about anything over which one has no control, whether the oppression of tyrants or the peril of earthquakes—on the necessity of this also, Epictetus and I are at one. Yet, close as is the resemblance between our opinions, I could not help feeling, as I read, that Epictetus was wise in holding his opinions, and that I, though holding

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the same opinions, was far from wise. For, indeed, though I held the same opinions for purposes of theory, I could not entertain them for a moment for purposes of conduct. Death, pain, and poverty are to me very real evils, except when I am in an armchair reading a book by a philosopher. If an earthquake happened while I was reading a book of philosophy, I should forget the book of philosophy and think only of the earthquake and how to avoid tumbling walls and chimneys. This, though I am the staunchest possible admirer of Socrates, Pliny, and people of that sort. Sound though I am as an armchair philosopher, at a crisis I find that both the spirit and the flesh are weak.

Even in the small things of life I cannot comport myself like a philosopher of the school of Epictetus. Thus, for example, when he advises us how to 'eat acceptably to the gods' and bids us to this end to be patient even under the most incompetent service at our meals, he commends a spiritual attitude of which my nature is incapable. 'When you have asked for warm water,' he says, 'and the slave does not heed you; or if he does heed you but brings tepid water; or if he is not even to be found in the house, then to refrain from anger and not to explode, is not this acceptable to the gods? . . . Do you not remember over whom you rule—that they are kinsmen, that they are brothers by nature, and they are the offspring of Zeus?'



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That is all perfectly true, and I should like very much to be a man who could sit in a restaurant, smiling patiently and philosophically while the waiter brought all the wrong things or forgot to bring anything at all. But in point of fact bad waiting irritates me. I dislike having to ask three times for the wine-list. I am annoyed when, after a quarter of an hour's delay, I am told that there is no celery. It is true that I do not make a scene on such occasions. I have not enough courage for that. I am as sparing of objurgations as a philosopher, but I suspect that the scowling spirit within me must show itself in my features. Certainly, I do not think of telling myself: 'This waiter is my kinsman; he is the offspring of Zeus.' Besides, even if he were, why should the offspring of Zeus wait so badly? Epictetus never dined at the Restaurant. And yet his patience might have served him even there. If so, what a difference between Epictetus and me! And, if I cannot achieve his imperturbability in so small affairs as I have mentioned, what hope is there of my being able to play the philosopher in presence of tyrants and earthquakes?

Again, when Epictetus expresses his opinions on material possessions and counsels us to be so indifferent to them that we should not object to their being stolen, I agree with him in theory and yet in practice I know I should be unable to obey him. There is nothing more certain than

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that a man whose happiness depends on his possessions is not happy. I am sure a wise man can be happy on a pittance. Not that happiness should be the aim of life, according to Epictetus or myself. But Epictetus at least holds up an ideal of imperturbability, and he assures us that we shall achieve this if we care so little for material things that it does not matter to us whether somebody steals them or not. 'Stop admiring your clothes,' he bids us, 'and you are not angry at the man who steals them.' And he goes on persuasively concerning the thief: '*He* does not know wherein the true good of man consists, but fancies that it consists in having fine clothes, the very same fancy that you also entertain. Shall he not come, then, and carry them off?' Yes, logically I suppose he should, and yet I cannot feel so at the moment at which I find that a guest at a party has taken my new hat and left his old one in its place. It gives me no comfort to say to myself: '*He* does not know wherein the true good of man consists, but fancies that it consists in having my hat.' Nor should I dream of attempting to console a guest at a party in my own house with such philosophy in similar circumstances. It is very irritating to lose a new hat. It is very irritating to lose anything at all, especially if one thinks it has been taken on purpose. I feel that I could imitate Epictetus if I lived in a world in which nothing

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happened. But in a world in which things disappear through loss, theft, and 'pinching', and in which bad meals are served by bad waiters in many of the restaurants, and a thousand other disagreeable things happen, an ordinary man might as well set out to climb the Himalayas in walking shoes as attempt to live the life of a philosopher at all hours.

In spite of this, however, most of us cannot help believing that the philosophers were right—right when they proclaimed, amid all their differences, that most of the things we bother about are not worth bothering about. It is easier to believe that oneself is a fool than that Socrates was a fool, and yet, if he was not right, he must have been the greatest fool who ever lived. The truth is, nearly everybody is agreed that such men as Socrates and Epictetus were right in their indifference to external things. Even men earning £10,000 a year and working for more would admit this. Yet, while admitting it, most of us would be alarmed if one of our dearest friends began to put the philosophy of Epictetus into practice too literally. What we regard as wisdom in Epictetus we should look on as insanity in an acquaintance. Or, perhaps, not in an acquaintance, but at least in a near relation. I am sure that if I became as indifferent to money and comfort and all external things as Epictetus, and reasoned in his fashion with a happy smile about

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property and thieves, my relations would become more perturbed than if I became a successful company promoter with the most materialistic philosophy conceivable. Think, for example, of the reasoning of Epictetus over the thief who stole his iron lamp :

He bought a lamp for a very high price ; for a lamp he became a thief, for a lamp he became faithless, for a lamp he became bestial. This is what seemed to him to be profitable !

The reasoning is sound, yet neither individually nor as a society do we live in that contempt of property on which it is based. A few saints do, but even they are at first a cause of great concern to their friends. When the world is normally cheerful and comfortable, we hold the paradoxical belief that the philosophers were wise men, but that we should be fools to imitate them. We are convinced that, while philosophers are worth reading, material things are worth bothering about. It is as though we enjoyed wisdom as a spectacle—a delightful spectacle on a stage which it would be unseemly for the audience to attempt to invade. Were the Greeks and the Romans made differently ? Did the admirers of Socrates and Epictetus really attempt to become philosophers, or were they like ourselves, hopeful of achieving wisdom, not

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by practice but through a magic potion administered by a wiser man than they ? To become wise without effort—by listening to a voice, by reading a book—it is at once the most exciting and the most soothing of dreams. In such a dream I took down Epictetus. And, behold, it was only a dream.

### XIII. Irritability      ∪      ∪      ∪      ∪

I WAS sitting on the top of a Holborn tram when a round-bodied, round-faced man, with curly red hair turning grey, came up the stairs and placed a little girl, scarcely older than a baby, on one of the seats. He sat down opposite to her, and, bringing out the early sporting edition of an evening paper, began to read through lists of the names of horses, printed in large type. Occasionally, he broke off his reading to take the child's hands from the window and bid her sit quiet. But for the most part he kept his bulging eyes fixed on the paper, for it is no easy matter to know the winner of a horse-race two hours before the race is run.

I myself was reading something or other, and so did not notice when the man and the child got off the tram. Accordingly, when the conductor, at a later stage in the journey, came and leaned over my shoulder and asked me, with a puzzled look, 'Where did that red-headed fellow with the kid get off?' I could only answer: 'I didn't notice. Probably at the last stop.' 'He's a beauty,' said the conductor, meditatively. 'Didn't he pay his fare?' I asked. 'Oh, he paid his fare all right,' said the conductor, 'but it was the way he paid it got my

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goat. You know, we've got transfer tickets on this line, and, when a passenger holds out his fare, we naturally don't want to give him a ticket that only entitles him to go to Holborn when he may want to go somewhere else. We don't want to make a mistake—in the passenger's own interests, you see. Well, when that red-headed cow held out his money for the tickets, I says to him, quite politely, "Holborn?"—just like that. And do you know what he answered? "No," he growls, as if I had insulted him, "*I* don't want to go to 'Olborn." Seemed to think I was poking my nose into his business, and that I was asking questions for the sake of asking them, like a kid. There was I doing my best to help him, and all the thanks I got for it was '—the conductor mimicked the growl of the red-headed cow bitterly—' "No, *I* don't want to go to 'Olborn." As much as to say, "What business is it of yours?" Well, I'm too long in the tooth to ask a man damn silly questions for nothing, and he might have known there was a reason for asking him. We're expected to be polite to passengers, and passengers ought to remember to be polite to us. Don't you think that's fair? All I said was "Holborn?" and he growls '—the conductor assumed the bass voice of an angry lion—' "No, *I* don't want to go to 'Olborn." Enough to make you lose your temper. I very nearly lost mine and told him

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to go to a hotter place than Holborn. Funny thing, as you get older, it's harder to keep your temper. I'm not as patient as I used to be. I feel more like flaring up of a sudden, and telling silly asses what I really think of them. But you can't do it—you can't afford to—not if you're a tram-conductor. But the way people behave—the silly things they ask, the silly things they do—it's no wonder some of the young conductors get a bit saucy sometimes, before they learn better.

'I couldn't help laughing at a thing I heard a new conductor saying one day last week. I was sitting in a tram at the —— terminus. You probably know, there's only a single line at that terminus and there were two trams standing at it. His was the last of the two. And a woman comes up and says to the conductor—he was a young fellow, new to the job—"Does this tram go first?" and he says, "Yes, madam." Well, of course, the other tram was bound to go first, unless the second could get off the line and go round it, and, when the woman saw the other tram moving off, she was naturally a bit wild and went for the conductor. "What right," she said, "had you to tell me that this tram went first when you knew it didn't?"' The conductor's face twinkled with delicious memories. 'I thought,' said he, 'he answered her very smart. "Madam," said he, "if you ask silly questions,



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you must expect silly answers." Of course, he oughtn't to have said it, but I couldn't help laughing. A smart young fellow—very smart, don't you think?—but too saucy. He'll get rapped over the knuckles some day for that kind of thing. Doesn't do, you know. A conductor has to learn to keep it bottled up. When you find it coming to the surface, bottle it up—it's the only thing to do. We've all been through it and been rapped over the knuckles, and every young conductor has to be rapped over the knuckles till he learns. It takes twenty years to make a tram-conductor. You mightn't think it, but it takes twenty years, learning to keep it bottled up and not to be saucy to the passengers.

'But the silly things people say and do—you'd be surprised at them. And they happen every day. Only the other day a lady came up to me and said: "Does this tram go to Holborn?" "No, madam," I told her, "Holborn's the other way." "Which way?" says she. Well, there was only one other way, unless she thought there were trams going to——' and he pointed first up to Heaven and then down to Hell. 'But I told her what she wanted. No use being saucy even if people are silly. A young conductor might have been different, like the young fellow I was telling you about. I won't forget that answer. "Madam," says he, "if you ask silly questions, you must

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expect silly answers." But it's no use answering like that if you want to be a tram-conductor. There's only one thing to do. Keep it bottled up, and tell it to the missus when you get home.'

Looking at the conductor himself, you would have said that he was the least irritable man in London, which is, by all accounts, one of the least irritable cities on earth. He had kindly grey eyes and a kindly smiling face, and I doubt if even a neighbour playing the gramophone all day could have worn out his patience. Yet, on his own admission, he was a man tempted to be cross like the rest of us, and able to keep it bottled up only with an effort. Never before had I appreciated the drastic moral training to which tram-conductors have to submit themselves and which is the secret of their amiability. I had thought of most of them as natural angels; yet apparently underneath they are human beings just like ourselves—like operatic stars, dancers, tennis-players and Members of Parliament. And I began to wish that a means could be found by which the rest of us could take a course of tram-conducting and learn to keep it bottled up even as the tram-conductors do.

Members of Parliament, for instance—why cannot they learn to behave like tram-conductors? I should like to see a picture of a tram-conductor hung above the Speaker's chair, bearing the motto, 'Keep it bottled up', as a

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reminder to legislators that it is possible for a human being to feel irritation and yet not to show it. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred are, I am sure, naturally cross. I am something of a hell-cat myself, and have often felt irritated by a fellow-creature for committing no worse sin than sitting down at the same table in a restaurant. Nothing but physical cowardice has saved me from making assaults on waiters, on gramophonists, on motorists who cling to the middle of the road, and on bad-tempered and bad-mannered people of all sorts. Only last year I ordered a waiter to take away the salmon he had brought me—a sign of the growing irritability of middle age. If I behaved naturally and courageously, I should behave like the doctor who was fined the other day for drenching a neighbour with his hosepipe. The doctor's complaint was that his neighbour's wife persisted in singing in 'an abominably loud voice' and all day long, a repertory consisting of 'Love Call', 'I Love the Moon', an air from *Samson and Delilah*, and 'The Rosary'. In his first access of exasperation the doctor got a mouth-organ and played it as rival music. He also beat the lid of the dustbin and drove his motor-car in and out of the drive, hooting all the time. Later on came the incident of the hosepipe, and after that the summons. Now I do not approve of the doctor's behaviour any more than I approve of the behaviour of

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Members of Parliament who make scenes in the House. I share their irritability, but know of no theory on which it can be defended. After all, the humiliation one feels after losing one's temper is evidence that there is something silly in it. And when our friends lose theirs we are sometimes as deeply distressed as if they had humiliated human nature itself. It is natural, but it doesn't do. Keep it bottled up. Dare to be a tram-conductor. It takes twenty years. but I suspect it is worth it.

#### XIV. In Defence of Punishment

I DO not know whether the Victorian father, who, as he flogged his erring son, murmured, 'This hurts me more than it hurts you', is a mythical figure. I myself was badly brought up: in other words, I escaped the whippings I deserved; so that I am unable to say whether this monstrous hypocrite existed outside legend. If he did, there is no milder name that can be applied to him than hypocrite. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule, and now and then a kindly man may have been discoverable to whom torturing a child was self-torture. But he can never have been common. It is safe to say that few men have ever struck a child who did not enjoy striking the child. A man who does not enjoy striking a child ought not to strike a child at all. I do not mean that flogging, if indulged in, should be sadistic, but that it should be an expression of anger and indignation. If it can be justified, it can be justified only as giving relief to a parent's or a schoolmaster's feelings, because—this, at least, is my opinion—it never yet did any good to mortal boy. Steele and Thackeray were both moralists, but they both protested against the folly of flogging. Hence, if it is to be preserved as a form of punishment, it should be put in its

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right place among the dubious pleasures of those who are no longer young.

Whether we have the right to enjoy punishing those who have done wrong is another question. Dean Inge, if we may judge from an article he has published in the *Evening Standard*, appears to think that we have. At least, he objects strongly to the theory that punishment should be inflicted on the wrongdoer only as a deterrent. 'The essence of punishment,' he declares, 'is retaliation. It is the expression of the righteous indignation of society, and its object is to cause the offender as much pain as we think he deserves. This is the plain truth of the matter.' If this is true, it is fairly clear that inflicting punishment must give us pleasure, since it is not intended either to do good to the offender or to deter others from committing a similar offence. It is a satisfaction of our desire for revenge, and as this it obtains the blessing of Dean Inge.

Whether it deserves this blessing or not, revenge, as the proverb says, is sweet. There is nothing the natural man enjoys more than a thoroughly vindictive punishment inflicted on somebody else. Even the humanest know that unholy rapture. Indeed, it is often the humanest people—people who love dogs and birds—who are the most savagely vindictive. I remember many years ago reading a review of a novel in which the hero was a man of science

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who inoculated guinea-pigs with the tetanus bacillus in the hope of discovering a cure which would save human beings from the same disease, and who himself died of tetanus in great agony as a result of getting cut by a broken glass tube in the course of his experiments. The reviewer, obviously a passionate humanitarian, denounced the vivisector for experimenting on animals, as from his point of view he had every right to do ; but he did not stop short at this. He went on to gloat over the sufferings of the dying vivisector—the ‘ vile brute ’ and ‘ inhuman monster ’, as he called him—and to express his satisfaction that the man had got what he richly deserved. One would have thought that a human being who had a heart capable of being touched by the sorrows of a guinea-pig might have spared a pang of sympathy for an errant fellow-creature dying one of the most painful of deaths. But we are so made that one sympathy often excludes another, and we become inhuman in the jubilee of our humanity.

I saw an example of this illogic one summer day when I was sitting in a garden in Essex, surrounded by women and children. In an adjoining field the corn was being cut with a reaping-machine, and, as the grain fell to the earth, a rabbit would occasionally escape from its disappearing jungle and bolt for the hedge. One or two labourers, knowing that this would

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happen, lay in wait with sticks and aimed what they hoped would be mortal blows at the rabbits flying past them. It was not a pleasant sight, and it was only the reflection that one had often eaten rabbits oneself—an unappetizing dish, I agree—that kept one from looking on the labourers as vile fellows. The women and children unfortunately did not pause to indulge in this reflection. One of the women—a charming and tender-hearted creature who would assassinate you if she saw you robbing a bird's nest—stood on the bank and shouted 'Brutes!' at the rabbit-hunters, who were luckily shouting and laughing too loudly over the chase to hear her. When one of the men tripped at top speed over another's stick and fell headlong, a little girl—somebody's niece, no doubt, but not mine—raised a cheer and cried: 'I hope he has broken his leg!' 'Oh, I could kill them!' exclaimed the tender-hearted lady, and the three little girls stood on the bank, shouting 'Beasts! Murderers!' It was in vain that I reminded them that we had lunched on two excellent chickens, done to death in a more cruel fashion than the rabbits, all of which, indeed, except one, escaped. 'I would like to see them tortured,' said the humane lady, and who can doubt that at that moment she experienced all the joy known to an American lyncher fired by moral indignation!

If the law did not restrain us, it is certain



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that the world would be full of humanitarian, as well as of personal, revenges. It became clear fairly early in the history of the human race, however, that revenge, though, after love, the purest of human pleasures, could not safely be left in private hands. Hence laws came into existence which enabled men to enjoy the passion of revenge by proxy. It is difficult to analyse our feelings and to say exactly how much of the pleasure of retaliation the ordinary man gets when he reads that a malefactor has been sentenced in the courts to a heavy punishment ; but I am sure that the element of pleasure exists. I doubt if we have any deep vindictive feeling against burglars or those who have committed crimes against property ; if we find any satisfaction in their being sent to prison, it is only because we feel that the world is a little safer for their temporary removal from it. On the other hand, thousands of people feel distinctly revengeful when they read of certain crimes against women, children, and animals. If a man, proved to have treated a child cruelly, is given a light sentence, letters pour into the papers demanding a punishment that will satisfy the sense of justice ; and it is easy to see from the tone of the letters that the writers are eager, not merely to deter others from committing the same crime, but to make a brute suffer as he deserves. It is the same if a man who has starved an old horse or flogged it

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unmercifully escapes with a fine. Our instinct for revenge rises in revolt and we clamour for a real punishment. For the time being, we are lynchers in our hearts. Every man is a born lyncher.

Even so, I doubt whether punishment can be justified on any grounds except that it acts as a deterrent to the evil-minded. True, the desire for retribution is a natural instinct, and an instinct that in its time has probably served a useful purpose ; but, cramped and confined by law and the progress of civilization, it has been so modified that it may even ultimately become a mere remnant of its old self, like the caudal appendix, and, in any case, the principle of deterrence has made it no longer necessary. Dean Inge, in attempting to show that punishment should be retributory and not merely reformatory or deterrent, makes use of an extraordinarily fallacious argument. He imagines the case of a man who has murdered his father and mother, and suggests that, if punishment should be only reformatory and deterrent, an enlightened judge ought to address the murderer in this fashion :

‘ Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty of a crime which in the days of our barbarous ancestry would have been thought worthy of exceptionally severe punishment. In ancient Rome you would have been tied up

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in a sack with a dog, a monkey, and a cock, and drowned in the Tiber. Still more cruel penalties might be quoted from other codes.

‘We, however, have abandoned the vindictive theory of punishment. The crime which you have committed is proved by statistics to be the rarest of all offences. For one reason or another, there seems to be practically no temptation for children to murder their parents. It is, therefore, not worth while to make an example of you in order to deter others from conduct to which they show no propensity.

‘There remains the other just object of punishment, as a deterrent. But as you are now an orphan it is impossible for you to repeat the offence for which you are now convicted. The judgment of the court is that you are bound over to keep the peace for six months.’

The mistake Dean Inge makes in treating his imaginary case is, of course, that he implies that in present circumstances a murderer is hanged not for having committed murder, but for having murdered a particular person. This happens not to be so. It does not matter to the law to-day whether a man has killed his father and mother or only his greengrocer. The punishment is the same, and the parricide is hanged on the theory that his execution will act

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as a deterrent, not only to potential parricides, but to potential murderers of all kinds whatsoever. The theory may be wrong, but, if it were not widely held, capital punishment would be abolished to-morrow.

None the less, it is curiously pleasant to find the Dean making so frank a confession of the vindictive element that he finds in human nature, or, in other words, in his own bosom. He is often wrong-headed, but how refreshing it is to find a writer who does not attempt to hide the real nature of his thoughts in woolly cant ! In his love of retribution he is a representative man—representative not only of the 'shoot-'em-down' clubmen, but of all those men, whether autocrats or Bolsheviks, who detest the most objectionable of their enemies as King Henry detested Becket. Extreme men of all parties will respond sympathetically to his declaration that 'the State has as good a right to remove undesirable citizens as a gardener has to weed his garden,' and to his assertion :

Political crimes ought to be more, not less, severely punished than private. Those who make plots against society must expect to be treated as public enemies ; good intentions are no excuse whatever.

Dean Inge, however, appears to have lost sight of the fact that on this principle the Bolshevik

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State has as much right to weed out the Christian and the capitalist as the capitalist State has to weed out those who plot its ruin. Such weeding-out satisfies a deep-seated instinct, and, therefore has something to be said for it. The chief argument against it is that it is so often futile in its results. Weeding-out was tried in Ireland, and now we have Mr. Churchill admitting its futility and quoting the saying : ' The grass grows over a grave, but never over the gallows.' If the satisfaction of the punisher were the justification of punishment, most of the ruthlessness of history would be justified. But men must be practical even in revenge, and the luxury of retaliation may be bought at too high a cost.

## XV. The Two Races of Anthophiles ♀

ON the surface, there seems to be something silly in trying to prevent human beings from picking flowers. Every one who is grown up remembers a time when it was thought no sin to sit with other infants on a green lawn and string daisy chains together in the sun. Most of us, too, have plucked honeysuckle from the hedges to taste sweeter honey than ever came from the comb. At the price of scratched hands we have torn wild roses from the hedges. We have risked our lives, stretching our baby bodies over the slow serpentine stream and pulling the yellow waterlilies up with their long stems. We have broken the spine of the buttercup in order to see the golden reflection of the flower on a fellow-mortal's chin—an infallible test, so tradition says, of the love of butter. The dandelions perished in our hands in order that we might press out the white juices from their stalks. Harebell and heartsease and violet—none of them was safe from us if we were in the mood to pick them. Not that we knew what to do with them when we had picked them, for we seldom wore them, and we did not always trouble to carry them home. But we seemed to have as deep an instinct for picking flowers as a cat has for chasing butterflies. And, as I

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have said, we saw no sin in it. There was a forbidden tree, but there were no forbidden flowers, in the Garden of Eden.

It is no wonder, then, that several voices have lately been raised in protest against the modern attempt to crush the natural desire to pick flowers. It seems like putting a fence round nature and warning children that they must look at the world only from ordered paths. It is to rob them of the freedom of the fields and to make crimes of their innocent pleasures. If to pluck flowers is to become an offence, we must reconsider the character of *Perdita* and be prepared to see her as a monster. All the old poets, with their talk of coronals and garlands, will have to be expurgated for the use of schools, and their references to the flowers of the fields will have to be removed as incitements to law-breaking. Policemen will lie in ambush behind the hedges, and, at sight of a child plucking a bluebell for a tinier sister, will hale it to the cells as a destroyer of the amenities of the countryside. The shadow of a new prohibition will darken the land, and children will scarcely dare to look at a lesser celandine lest they should be seized by an uncontrollable impulse to pick it and so take the first step that may lead to the scaffold. Old criminals a hundred years hence will probably look back to the time when they loved wild flowers not wisely but too well as the beginning of their downfall.

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There is no telling what may happen if we add a new sin to the long catalogue of sins. All we know is that the world will no longer be the world we once knew, with its cornucopia of birds and flowers.

There is usually a good case for leaving things as they are, and all our sentimental memories tell us that here is such a case. Who would grudge a poor child a pleasure that can be had without money and without price? Who would grudge it even the few pence it can earn by gathering primroses and selling them to passing strangers? It is all very well to preserve the amenities of the countryside, but the very phrase smacks of inhumanity. There is in it something sermonical and rather loftily above the world of common indulgences and desires. Who ever thought of amenities in his delight in nature? Keats did not tell the nightingale how much he thought it added to the amenities of Hampstead. Worthing may have amenities, but not the fields. The word, indeed, is a Latin abomination that wipes out the beauties of the visible world as if with a wet cloth.

But yet, whatever the sentimental may say, the people who talk about amenities are right in everything except their vocabulary. There is not a single argument in favour of leaving things as they are that is not puerile rubbish. The plain fact of the situation is that, if human



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beings go on picking flowers as greedily as they do at present, there will soon be few flowers left in the country to pick. There is precisely the same argument for forbidding people to pick flowers—or, at least, for forbidding them to pick flowers by the basketful or to dig them up by the roots—as there is for forbidding people to cut the pictures in the National Gallery out of their frames and to take them home with them. Any one with a sense of beauty must occasionally have longed to carry off a picture from a public gallery. What beauty it would lend to the home ! How much lovelier it would seem there than on the dull walls of a crowded gallery ! There is only one argument against taking it—that there are not enough good pictures to go round. And we have now reached a stage at which there are not enough wild flowers to go round. In the old days a meadow of wild daffodils was lavish beyond the needs of a countryside. With the popularization of the bicycle, however, began the invasion of the country by the hordes of the town, and no sooner were the daffodils in flower than long processions of cyclists bore down on them and went home with the blooms as trophies on their handle-bars. And, now that the motor-car has been added to the bicycle, the pillage of the fields is increasing tenfold. Roots are dug up and carried off to add to the amenities of a suburban garden. Primroses and bluebells are

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torn from the wayside to die on a drawing-room table. It is a charming instinct that impels human beings to do these things—the same instinct that once led them to shoot and stuff dead birds and to hang dead butterflies in glass cases on their walls. And it was an instinct with which it was difficult to quarrel so long as the riches of nature more than kept pace with the amiable greed of mankind. But nature is announcing the possibility of exhaustion. Birds and butterflies have disappeared within the memory of men still living, and forest glades which old men remember as gardens in June are now as flowerless as the Strand.

Thus, there is good reason for considering the lilies of the field in a different fashion from our grandfathers. We must cease to behave as our grandfathers behaved in order to preserve the world that our grandfathers knew. It is pleasant enough to burlesque the notion of a policeman haling a child before the magistrate for making a daisy-chain ; but we know that in practice that is not the sort of thing that is going to happen, and that laws can be made that will leave abundant flowers in the country places without branding children who pluck a wild rose as criminals. Last year, the Hertfordshire County Council passed a by-law which prohibited the uprooting of wild flowers and ferns in the county ; and Londoners who visit Hertfordshire in their cars during the week-end

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will enjoy the countryside no less on that account. I know fields that were once banks of flowers that are now wildernesses as a result of the mania for uprooting. It is easy to see that, if the mania increased sufficiently, the Home Counties would in time become as bare of many of the most beautiful flowers as Hampstead Heath. The locust is not more destructive than the lover of flowers who kills and steals the thing he loves. He is as much an enemy of the pleasures of other men as a man who would shoot nightingales.

Common sense suggests, indeed, that we should be at as much pains to preserve the flowers of the countryside as to preserve historic buildings or birds or big game. I am not sure that it would be a bad thing to forbid the sale of wild flowers, for the increasing sale of wild flowers has undoubtedly helped to diminish and destroy them. There are enough flowers grown in gardens to fill all the bowls and vases in the towns, and there is no need to raid the fields for such purposes. If we wish to preserve the country we shall have to begin to look on the birds and flowers that populate it as we look on the birds and flowers in a park. They are there for our pleasure, not for our appropriation. The country is no longer a wild place of unlimited exuberance. It is a nation-wide garden. Not that it need ever become tame like a garden. In a sane world, we shall

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never have to breed goldfinches deliberately as we breed hens, and campion and rest harrow, unlike tulips, will grow uninvited. The country will remain as it always was if only we leave it alone. Even a London building plot fenced-in returns in a few months to the riches of nature. The country can be most easily saved, indeed, not by doing something about it, but by doing nothing about it—not even uprooting a fern. It is the simplest recipe for the creation of a beautiful world that was ever invented. Leave it alone, and you will have butterfly orchises and all the other toys of nature in abundance. Nature is no niggard, but even nature demands a rest from the restless voracity of man. She will become a spendthrift only if we become careful. Only if we grow civilized will she remain wild.

## XVI. This Freedom



I WAS with a man the other day who defended the practices of Fascism against a Liberal antagonist, and who showed equal vigour a quarter of an hour later in denouncing the English licensing regulations which compel the public-houses to close their doors for a portion of the afternoon. His attitude would have been logical enough if he had based his argument on his personal convenience and had said frankly that it pleased him when in Italy to find the trains punctual, but that it displeased him when in England to find the public-houses closed between three and five o'clock or even for longer. He took no such low ground, however, and it was clear that he honestly believed that the Italians were fine fellows for submitting to the iron regulations of Fascism, while Englishmen were little better than slaves for submitting to having their public-houses shut for a few hours in the day. If this were an uncommon paradox it might be put down as an individual oddity of belief ; but liberty is the last thing in the world about which the majority of human beings are logical. In order to be logical about liberty one has to be either an out-and-out defender of dictators or an out-and-out anarchist. Wisdom, no doubt,

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lies between these extremes, but it is almost bound to be illogical. And it is better that men should contradict themselves than that they should be doctrinaires.

At the same time, I think that a good many Englishmen to-day have acquired the habit of seeing the gnats of restriction in their own country as bigger than the camels of oppression in any other country or in any other age. It is good to denounce Dora and all that she stands for, but there is no good in pretending that there have not been, and are not, greater tyrants than Dora. One cannot attack Dora effectively, indeed, except on the assumption that she is a nuisance rather than a despot. She outrages common sense more than she outrages liberty. If it is important that she should be fought, it is less because a man cannot breathe freely in her presence than because she represents a principle of petty interference which is in danger of being extended if protests are not made in time. Where many of the critics of Dora injure their case, however, is in assuming that under her nagging reign Englishmen are less free than they used to be. The plain fact is that, in spite of Dora, more Englishmen enjoy more freedom to-day than at any other period of history. (I speak, I confess, as one who knows very little history.)

Many people mistake the increase in the number of restrictions in modern times for a

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sign of the diminution of liberty. It is not necessarily anything of the sort. The danger of restrictions lies less in their quantity than in their quality, and there is no denying that, while restrictions have grown more numerous, the most oppressive of them have either been removed or have been considerably relaxed. The ordinary Englishman to-day is freer to do and say what he pleases than he was even a generation ago. The agricultural labourer is compelled to notify the birth of a child to the Registrar and to notify a case of infectious disease in his home, but he is freer than he once was from the fear of being evicted from his home if he votes as he wishes at an election. He loses no real freedom by the restrictions, while he gains very real freedom by the removal of an ancient tyranny. It is an error, indeed, to regard restrictions as being in themselves incompatible with liberty. The growth of restrictions may actually go hand-in-hand with the growth of liberty. It is even conceivable that the happiest nation in present circumstances would be the nation that at the same time could boast of the most restrictions and the greatest freedom.<sup>1</sup>

For, until Utopia arrives, restrictions must multiply. At a moderate stage of civilization, or whatever one cares to call it, they are as necessary as traffic regulations. Nor have I ever met a man, however liberal in doctrine, who did

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not believe in some restriction or other. We all call for the removal of restrictions that annoy us, and at the same time for the imposition of restrictions on the people who annoy us. Thus Mr. A. P. Herbert, that valiant defender of the liberties of the common man, while justly indignant at the present restrictions imposed on consumers of beer and tobacco, is at the same time a passionate advocate of all kinds of restrictions for motorists. Yet, if restrictions are an evil in themselves, it is no less an infringement of liberty to forbid a motorist to drive as fast as he likes than to forbid a smoker to buy cigarettes when he likes. In any case, it is common sense, not an abstract theory of liberty, that should decide the matter. Or if a theory of liberty is involved, it is a theory of the greatest liberty of the greatest number. If the liberty of the road-hog diminishes the liberty of pedestrians and of other motorists, most men will agree in restricting the former, and the ordinary citizen will feel that his liberty has been increased by the restriction. Similarly, if the liberty of the smoker can be secured only by the loss of the liberty of innumerable shop assistants, most of us would take the view that the liberty of the smoker must go. The valid argument against the Doraesque legislation of the present day is that it imposes inconvenient restrictions on the hours of shopping when the problem could be solved to the convenience of



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everybody merely by restricting the hours which shop assistants are compelled to work. In the ideal modern state as few restrictions as are necessary would be imposed with as little inconvenience as is possible, but the few restrictions would be a great many.

It is certain, for example, that in all countries we shall see more and more restrictions of the kind that prevented a poor Irish widow last year from taking her aspidistra with her to Canada. The nations have been so much alarmed by the results of introducing apparently harmless plants and animals into countries in which they are not indigenous—the rabbit into Australia, the blackberry into New Zealand—that they are becoming as suspicious of a strange root or a strange animal as of a human alien. Most English naturalists would agree that it would have been better if some restrictions on the importation of strange animals had been in force in England in the last century. It was unfortunate that an Englishman was then free to import the Little Owl and let it loose among the native wild birds. It is said by some, though I believe it is denied by others, that the freedom of another Englishman led to the introduction of the grey squirrel into the country, and so to the disappearance of the native red squirrel from many districts. Naturalists, therefore, however ardent believers in freedom they may be, clamour every year for more and more

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restrictions on the freedom of their fellow countrymen. They have already contrived to have the robbing of certain birds' nests forbidden, and would like to go farther in the same direction. If they have their way they will put a stop to the uprooting of wild flowers—even, perhaps, to their reckless gathering; many of them would vote for a law which would deny a man the right to keep a wild bird in a cage.

Similarly, there are aesthetes and others so intent on saving the beauty of the countryside that they would deny an Englishman the right to build whatever kind of house he fancies in an old village street or to paint his petrol pump in the bright colours likeliest to catch the eye of a passing motorist. There are selfish motorists who cry for more and brighter petrol pumps, but it is improbable that any one will heed their cry. Life in a crowded country must be regulated to a degree for which there was no need in an emptier world, and men must be prepared to surrender a part of their freedom in order to be free to live in a country worth living in. We are beginning to see that it is intolerable that a man should be allowed to build a house without regard to the question whether by doing so he was injuring a neighbourhood. Individualism so complete, while it may make one individual happy, may make a thousand individuals miserable. And individualism of that kind will, one hopes, soon be gone for ever.

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The assertion of a brilliant individualist of our own generation that the modern Englishman enjoys less freedom than a Roman slave in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian seems to me absurd. It is an assertion that could be made only by a man who regarded all restrictions as being in themselves evil. The truth is, there are some restrictions that we feel as little as the pressure of the atmosphere ; there are others that weigh upon us like a heavy burden. The real problem of the individualist to-day should be to remove the second kind of restrictions while accepting the first, even if they are in theory an outrage on his philosophy. He should be consoled by the reflection that without restrictions of some sort the freedom of the ordinary man would be impossible. The freedom of leisure that the ordinary Englishman enjoys to-day is the result of the restriction of his hours of work. All restrictions should be judged, not merely in so far as they prohibit something or other, but in so far as they actually increase or diminish human liberty. Dora, I think, diminishes it, but even she is no female Nero. A man is freer in a country in which the law limits the hours for the sale of cigarettes than in a country in which it limits his right to say what he believes. And, even as regards freedom of speech, there are some restrictions that are as light as air and others that are really oppressive. It is only the last that are worth troubling about.

## XVII. The Gate-Crasher      ♪      ♪      ♪

WAS it not Mr. Shaw who once, on being invited by a weekly paper to contribute to a 'symposium' (as it is called) on the subject, 'The Bravest Deed I Ever Knew', picked the attempted assassination of President McKinley as his choice? I am not sure, however, whether the courage of the assassin is so eminent above that of his fellows. It is often a hot-brained courage, fevered and fanatical, and a man totally incapable of what Napoleon called 'five o'clock in the morning' courage might easily be capable in a moment of aberration of murdering a fellow-creature. Much higher in the scale, it seems to me, is the cold-blooded courage of the gate-crasher, and I think the palm for fearlessness in recent times must be given to those who have forced their way into dinners and dances where they must be hated and despised as pretenders and intruders.

I have myself none of the instincts of the gate-crasher. I have neither the ambition nor the spirit. If people do not want me at their parties, I am content to remain away. I sometimes feel awkward enough at parties to which I have been invited: my heart would be in my boots if I entered a drawing-room in which I was a stranger to my hostess. Even in

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childhood I had no gift for forcing my way into places where one was not supposed to be unless one had been invited or had paid for admission. No, not even into a football-match. Bolder boys would invite me : ' Come on. I know a gate we can climb over ', and sometimes in trepidation I climbed. But I was never happy when I did so. Even when I was successfully inside the ground, I never felt safe till I was out again, but expected every moment that a hand would seize me by the collar and that I would be ejected with public ignominy. I felt the same in regard to all kinds of trespassing. For me, if I had my way, a notice, ' Trespassers Prosecuted ', was always enough. Among my friends, however, were children of a bolder genius, who, on seeing such a notice, would brighten as at a challenge to fight in the street. They would climb barbed wire—and I, alas ! with them—into fields that had no charm save that they were forbidden. In their company how often have I fearfully clambered over walls into people's gardens and roved their parks in search of chestnuts, I with the longings of a runaway, they with the longings of adventurers ! And how I admired their daring ! Even as they ran—and they often ran—they seemed to run, less for the purpose of saving their skins, than for the pleasure of outwitting a householder, a gamekeeper or a detective. They were never happier than when they thought they were

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being chased by detectives, and their happiness was increased by the fact that they saw detectives everywhere. I, too, ran, but not in exhilaration. I ran to save my skin.

It is the same kind of daring, I suppose, that makes boys trespass and that makes them travel in trains without tickets, or in a first-class carriage with a third-class ticket. One of my childhood's friends caused me many an hour of distress by his passion for cheap first-class travel. As the train steamed into the station, he would seize the door-handle of a first-class carriage, fling the door open, saying, 'This looks all right !' and wait for me to step in. 'There's plenty of room in the third,' I would say nervously. 'I know there is,' he would agree ; 'but this is more comfortable.' And I would get in beside him and loll on luxurious cushions that gave me no real comfort, since I could think of nothing but the dreadful, accusing face of the guard that was sure to appear at the window at the next station. My friend, however, would whistle, sing, stamp his feet on the floor, take his cap in his mouth by the peak and toss it on to his head like a juggler, and behave as if he were a director's favourite son. He would even stand at the window when the train stopped at a station and call out to the guard as he passed, 'When are we due to get in ?' while I, feeling like an escaped convict, longed only to be under the seat. And I never saw

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him questioned, so impressive was his self-confidence. He was the sort of infant who, if he bought a ticket for the gallery in the theatre, would end the evening by some magical process in the stalls. He had a great belief in the possibility of getting in anywhere, as he put it, on the nod. He would nod at commissionaires, ticket-collectors, and all sorts of people, and they would all nod back. Some day, no doubt, he will nod his way into heaven. I, on the other hand, am one of those who will be asked for a ticket.

I suspect that my friend was a typical member of that considerable section of society which in later life devotes so much of its energies to gate-crashing and to the defrauding of railway companies. There are, no doubt, a number of real criminals in the gallant band. But these must be in the minority. Or perhaps not on the railways. Lord George Hamilton announced last year that in the course of twelve months there had been 1,300,000 cases of passengers travelling without a ticket or travelling first-class with a third-class ticket, or travelling beyond the point named on the ticket, on the Metropolitan District Railway alone, and it is difficult to believe that all these were attributable to the spirit of adventure. Many of the offences, no doubt, were not deliberate. One occasionally gets into a train with the intention of getting out at one station and, later, decides



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to go on to another. And one often meets on the platform a man who is travelling in a different class and goes with him for the pleasure of his company. There are, indeed, a dozen reasons for such conduct besides the fraudulent ones. The only man I ever knew in London who had the habit of travelling first with a third-class ticket was a queer creature who had scarcely any money and a good deal of social ambition. He went about the world trying to persuade that part of the world that did not know him that he was a person of importance, and he even frequently confided to a fellow-traveller in a train that he was a peer or a great actor. He dressed with the most obtrusive carefulness even in his poverty, and was a leading authority on the things that are not done and the places where you 'can't be seen'. If he saw you reading a Liberal newspaper in public, for instance, he would say: 'Put that thing away. You can't be seen reading a rag like that.' He did not mind reading the Liberal Press in the secrecy of his lodgings, but he was afraid that, if he were seen doing this in public, onlookers might not realize that he was a member of the upper classes, and he was honestly convinced that a Conservative newspaper, exhibited in public, would be accepted as evidence of his gentility. One of his mottoes, as might be expected, was: 'One can't be seen in a third-class carriage.' And, as he could



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afford only the third-class, he always bought a third-class ticket and travelled first. When he was caught, it was his rule to pretend that he had lost his ticket and to pay the whole fare. Though he would have saved money by paying merely the excess fare, he could not, even for this purpose, bear the humiliation of letting the guard see that he was only a third-class traveller in the wrong compartment. Thus he was no common type of bilker, but a man consumed with the lofty ambition to play the part of an English gentleman. This, I fear, is a spirit seldom to be found among the fare-dodgers on the railways. They are not, for the most part, high-hearted trespassers, but only petty thieves. It is unjust to the gate-crashers to name them in the same breath.

For the gate-crasher, as a rule, follows his profession for his amusement. I doubt if even the two hundred and fifty uninvited guests who on one occasion turned up at a party at the Duchess of Sutherland's and ate her strawberries and her caviare were influenced by the desire for a free supper. Probably, they belonged to a secret society whose members were committed to such trespass as a form of sport. I am sure the friend of my boyhood, if he were in London, would be busy flitting from party to party every night, even if he were not acquainted with a single hostess. He would be shaking Cabinet Ministers by the hand at one party, and would

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join the crowd of the artist's friends in the artists' room after every fashionable concert. I suspect you would find him in the Royal Enclosure at Ascot, the only person there without an invitation. Or you might find him on the front bench of the House of Commons, cleverly smiling his way out before he was discovered and ejected. Such feats would appeal to the grandeur of his spirit. And he would mean no ill by them. He would mean only to show that he could do what most people would think it impossible for him to do. He is one with the heroic hoaxers, the cool men, the brave men, actors to whom all the world is a stage. I hope he will not come to London. If he does, I am sure I shall be arrested for being found in some Duchess's house in suspicious circumstances. I should not want to go, but, if he gave the word, I should have to. There are men in whose company one cannot play the coward. Besides, if I protested, he would reply: 'It's quite a nice house—good food, good champagne.' And I should not be able to deny it.

## XVIII. Scandalmongers      ∞      ∞      ∞

A CLERGYMAN in the provinces has founded a league for the suppression of scandal. The members take a pledge neither to talk scandal nor to listen to it for the next twelve months. I do not propose to become a member, and I will tell you why.

In the first place, I like my friends, and I should lose them all if I protested against their talking scandal. I have not a single friend who does not occasionally talk scandal, and we talk scandal about our common friends as well as about our common enemies. Probably my friends talk scandal about me when I am not there. I do not object if some one does not repeat it to me. Scandal at its best is the truth that we tell behind a man's back because it would be unkind to tell it to his face. It is truth in its humanest form. I have many friends who would be deeply pained if I told them everything I think and know about them. I have many friends who would pain me deeply if they told me everything they think and know about me. Hence, when we are together, we leave many things unsaid at the back of our minds. This silent criticism does not mean that we are not sincerely devoted to each other. We like people none the less because we think

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things about them that we should never think of telling them we think. There are friendships of such perfect intimacy that there is no need of concealment on either side, but they are rare. As a general rule, when you see two friends together, you see two hypocrites, each of them a little less critical of the other in speech than in thought. And this is as it should be. The 'candid friend' is the least tolerable sort of friend. Let him be as candid as he likes behind our backs, but let him not humiliate us by telling us unpleasant truths about ourselves that we know as well as he does but do not talk about. On the other hand, the strain of not telling the truth about a man to his face would become unbearable if we could not tell it to somebody. Hence we tell it to a third person, discreetly chosen as a person who will understand. Boswell talked scandal about Johnson in a book such as even he would have shrunk from repeating to Johnson's face. We do not regard this as a blot on their friendship. On the contrary, Boswell is universally praised for refusing to listen to Hannah More's appeal to observe the mild hypocrisies of friendship in his biography.

Not all forms of scandal, of course, are equally commendable. Even the most ardent champion of scandal could find little to say in favour of that kind of scandalmongering which consists in giving away secrets that have been confided

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to us by a friend. This is mere treachery. The ethics of scandal permit us to talk only such scandal as will do no one an injury. Hence, we have the right neither to betray our friends' secrets, nor to tear their reputations to pieces in the presence of strangers. It is as important, to my mind, to be not quite candid about one's friends in the presence of strangers, as it is to be not quite candid about them to their faces. Scandal about friends is legitimate only among friends. Scandal about acquaintances, on the other hand, is legitimate in the far larger circle of acquaintances. One of the rules of the game is, indeed, that the better you know a man, the more restricted is your right to talk scandal about him. As for people you do not know at all, you may tell whatever stories you like about them, but not too publicly, because of the law of libel.

Not that it is, on the whole, worth while telling scandalous stories about people you do not know. I never could get much pleasure from listening to the truth about the private life of a Cabinet Minister from a man who, like myself, knew him only from his photograph in the newspapers. In the first place, I never believe stories told to me about people I do not know by people who do not know them. If I did, I should have to believe that most of the eminent men of our time are monsters whose vices would sully the pages of Suetonius. Why,

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I heard enough scandalous stories about eminent men during my first two years in London from one person to wreck the reputation of England throughout Europe. He was a little Scotsman who led a good life himself and was honestly convinced that everybody else led an evil one. Perhaps, he excepted his friends from this suspicion, for all his worst stories were about people he had never met. If you mentioned a great writer to him, he would say : ' I tell you a thing I heard about him the other day,' and he would proceed, with his face screwed up with horror, to accuse a man of unblemished life of the most scarlet sins of Heliogabalus. If the name of a famous actress cropped up in the conversation, he would open one eye wider than the other and say : ' You know what *her* vice is ? ' On my saying ' No,' he would name the vice, adding off-handedly : ' I thought everybody knew that ! ' If a woman of ill-fame was brought into the courts and to the general surprise was acquitted, he would lean over the table, his hair bristling with excitement, and would give the name of the bishop who for a very good reason of his own—(with a solemn wink)—exerted his influence on her behalf behind the scenes. If you asked him, ' How do you know the Bishop is that sort ? ' he would sigh as if he had met Doubting Thomas and say : ' My dear man, it has been common talk this ten years. The first time I heard the

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Bishop was that sort was in the bar of the Midland Hotel in Glasgow in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-four.' I will not swear to the Midland, but it was some hotel or other. If he gave the name of the place at which he had heard the story and the date, he gave them in such a manner as showed that he regarded them as the most convincing evidence possible that the story was true. I do not think he had much sense of evidence. If he could produce no other evidence in support of a calumny, he would in answer to a challenge exclaim impatiently : ' Why, it's common talk ! ' In this way he undermined the reputations of young and old, male and female, lay and cleric, noble and commoner. There is no profession that he did not libel. He was honourably impartial in his denigrations.

Since meeting him, I must have heard a hundred thousand stories as scandalous, and I doubt if one in ten thousand of them was true. I have now come to the point of disbelieving almost all scandalous stories upon instinct. If I am given details of a famous woman's love affairs, I immediately conclude that she leads a life of saintly chastity. If I hear that an eminent surgeon is a hopeless drunkard, I am convinced that he is a teetotaller. If I am told that a great general is a notorious coward, I see him in my mind's eye as a lion of courage. Nor is this attitude so unreasonable as it seems.

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The one thing we may be certain of in regard to stories of the eminent is that most of them are lies. Lies are told about the great because people like to believe lies about the great. This drags the great down to the common level, and is a perverted expression of the passion for equality. And, for this reason, we tell lies about the great who are dead as well as about the great who are still alive. They are, it is amusing to reflect, usually told about the dead in the name of truth. In our revolt against the Victorian habit of telling respectable lies about the dead, we apparently believe that truth consists in telling disreputable lies about them. I am not sure that the Victorian practice was not the more truthful of the two. Then, at least, great men played their parts with the gravity of the heroes of the Greek tragedies. The Greek tragedians, no doubt, lied about human nature, but probably the Greek comic writers lied about it even less truthfully. Comedy is scandal in its most artistic form.

It may be said that tragedy is also founded on scandal—scandal about Oedipus, Lear, Hamlet, and their families. And unquestionably the tragic writers reveal facts about the home life of their heroes such as Victorian biographers would have done their best to slur over. Even my Scottish friend would not have wished, I think, to add much to what Aeschylus tells us of the family history of Agamemnon. Still, he



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would have given a different twist to the story. He would have made all the figures in the tragedy seem mere monsters of depravity and have deprived them of any lingering shred of nobility. He would have soused them in muddy waters.

Possibly it was an all-embracing jealousy that was the cause of his extraordinary love of believing the worst about everybody. I am sure it is people of jealous disposition who are most given to malicious gossip—foxes without tails who like to believe that every other fox suffers from something still worse than taillessness.

Well, we must have our consolations. I have been jealous myself, and, in the acutest moments of my suffering, a story to the discredit of a better man has at times made the world seem temporarily a fairer place.

## XIX. The Right to Be Sentimental    ♪

‘**M**EN given to tears are good men.’ I found this Greek proverb in a dictionary and it flattered me, for I had been to *The Singing Fool*, and during the performance large and unaccustomed tears had made rivers down my cheeks. Even now when I am sitting at home and remember the picture of Mr. Al Jolson taking the little child on his knee and telling it a story, it is as much as I can do to keep from breaking down ; and when I remember how he sang ‘Sonny Boy’ with that wonderful catch in his voice, I feel my face twitching into the curious shape which the human face takes only at the approach of a sneeze or of a fit of weeping. If I were a boy, I should be whistling the tune in the street. As it is, a kind of inaudible hum—a hum of song just on the edge of sobbing—continues inside me, and those unbearably moving words :

When I am old and grey, dear,  
Promise you won’t stray, dear,  
For I love you so,  
Sonny boy,

stream back into my memory till I could howl.

I do not think that any of the great master-pieces of the stage could have affected me in

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this fashion. Euripides—‘Euripides the human with his droppings of warm tears’, as Mrs. Browning oddly described him—was a moving writer, but *The Trojan Women* did not compel tears to flow in the same torrential measure as this. Shakespeare was a master of the melting mood, but I am sure I wiped away more tears from my face during *The Singing Fool* than I have done through *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* all counted together. There are pages of Charles Lamb and of Dickens that I dare not read aloud, but I would rather read out the most lachrymary passage in either of them than stand up and sing ‘Sonny Boy’. The truth is, it is not always the greatest plays and books that move us most easily to tears. Probably a greater number of people have been moved to tears by Horner’s Penny Stories than by the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The writers of melodrama have made more men and women cry than Shakespeare. The power of educing tears, indeed, is not necessarily an artistic faculty at all, though it is a frequent accompaniment of the greatest artistic faculties. It is a gift—like the gift of farce or the gift of sensationalism—which enables a writer or a performer to tap our emotions, however near the surface they may be. The writer of detective stories works on our fears that lie near the surface: the writer of farces on the surface of our risibility.

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The sentimental writer does the same with our tenderer emotions.

For some reason, however, the sentimentalist has seldom been awarded the same honour as the comedian or the sensationalist. Since the later part of the nineteenth century men of large intellect have again and again confessed their enjoyment of farces and sensational stories that had very small literary value ; but they have been unanimously scornful of the too obviously sentimental appeal even of certain passages in such great writers as Sterne and Dickens. When they have used the word ' sentimental ' they imagine they have uttered a final and damning judgment. This seems to me to be absurd. I hold that a man has as much right to cry as to laugh or to be ' thrilled '. It is very pleasant to cry when there is nothing in particular to cry about, and there is no good reason why we should not enjoy ourselves superficially in this fashion as in the others. After all, a man may admire Bach and yet not be above responding to the jigging of a fox-trot. We cannot live permanently on the heights of the arts. There is a time for being a highbrow, and a time for being a lowbrow.

I suppose that the objection to the too facile tear is due to the feeling that something fine is being degraded by the sentimentalists. We are less tolerant of cheap tears than of cheap

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laughter and of cheap excitement. We even call them insincere. But there is no noticeable insincerity in such a song as 'Sonny Boy': it is a popular and superficial expression of a universal emotion—the love of a father for his child. In a thousand years, no doubt, it will be forgotten: it will have perished, and those few lines in which Homer describes Hector's infant son shrinking from the plumed helmet on the eve of battle will have survived in perpetual freshness. But, meanwhile, the song reduces us to a silliness of tears. The great passages of literature which describe the sorrows of mortal men catch us up into the world of the imagination, making to-day one with ten thousand yesterdays. David's cry over the death of Absalom, Lear as he mourns over the dead Cordelia—there is a more enduring expression of grief in these than in all the sentimental writing of the nineteenth century. But the two kinds of writing are not really rivals. The second is merely entertainment touched with emotion.

It fails, of course, if it cannot by some means or other give at least a corner of our imagination the illusion of life. We demand this illusion of all kinds of fiction, even the most catchpenny. When we read a sensational story, we shut off our critical sense of reality in order that by a process of make-believe we may be subject to the illusion. We do this again when we go to

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see such a comedy as *A Damsel in Distress*. If we took too sharp a sense of reality into the theatre with us, we should not be able to laugh at farces. We have a tacit understanding with the farce-writer, however, that if he plays his tricks fairly enough, we shall become his dupes and accept the existence of his puppet world for two hours. It seems to me that the sentimental entertainer should be allowed to play tricks with it like the others. There can be no great harm in making people cry. At the same time it must be admitted that it is more difficult to make an intelligent human being cry over rubbish than it is to make him laugh or grow excited over rubbish. As he laughs over rubbish, he is not tempted into the opposite mood by the contrast between the rubbish and real life, but as he cries, the contrast between the rubbish and real life touches his sense of the ridiculous and makes him wish to laugh. That is why no one could go on crying over that once-famous sentimental ballad by George R. Sims, 'Billy's Rose'.

Billy's dead and gone to glory, so is Billy's  
sister Nell—

the first line still remains in my memory after forty years. I remember being deeply moved by it when I heard it recited by a man with a moustache at a Sunday-school *soirée*. But it does not move me to-day; the vocabulary

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itself has grown ridiculous. If 'Billy's Rose' were a true story—the story of a real dying child who longed for a rose, and who thought that the rose flung on the roadside from her carriage by a rich, petulant lady had come from Heaven in answer to his prayer—it would wring the heart. But it was told in such a way as not to seem true for long, and it remains in the memory only like a parody. Even so, I enjoyed feeling miserable over 'Billy's Rose', and I enjoy remembering my enjoyment.

Whatever view we take of sentimentality, it seems to me that we had better prepare to enjoy it since an orgy of it is probably on the way. Now that the 'movie' has evolved into the 'talkie', I shall be surprised if we have not a series of film children who will break our hearts in the most agreeable fashion. Hitherto I have never cared much for the stage child. I always felt that the child ought to be at home in bed, and stage children generally seemed to me unpleasantly precocious and unnatural. The film does not seem to have the same effect on children. Even the baby in the cradle can behave naturally on the screen; and a child of two can say 'Daddy' in a way that will make an evil-living old bachelor blow his nose and resolve to be a better man. You will realize how great is the appeal of the child to strong and slightly-intoxicated men if you recall the effect of songs about children in the Victorian

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music-halls. How often have I sat in the gallery of a theatre of varieties on a Saturday night, while grown men all round me joined huskily in some such chorus as Katie Lawrence's

Daddy's gone to London, where the streets are paved  
with gold ;  
Daddy's gone to London, where the kids are never cold ;  
There are lots of toys  
For the girls and boys,  
And when Dada comes back  
He will bring a geegee for his good boy Jack.

Nothing is here for tears, you say. I do not agree with you. I do not know what is the moral effect of such indulgence in emotion ; but I am confident that, until all men are artists all the time, such emotion will continue to be indulged in. And with the coming of the 'talkie' things are going to get worse—or better. We shall have processions of Little Willies who will make us sob as the audiences of the world have never sobbed before.

The big round tears  
Coursed one another down his innocent nose  
In piteous chase.

That is how we shall all be behaving in the cinema of the future. And oh, how happy we shall be !



## XX. The Straight and Narrow Path ∞

*The straight and narrow path for me !—OLD SONG*

MOST of us, I suppose, have, or have had, aspirations after a better life. Our chief regret is that we did not take definite steps towards the better life at an age at which the will and character were malleable. Looking back, we can see how easy it is for youth to shape its own destiny. Habits are still unformed, and the boy in his teens can choose any habits he pleases. A few temptations may assail him, but they are only the temptations of impulses which are much more easily resisted than the temptations arising from habits thirty or forty years old. Take, for example, the temptation to smoke. At the age of fifteen, what is it ? Nothing, certainly, that it needs a heroic will to stand out against. If I were fifteen years old, I could take the packet of cigarettes out of my pocket and throw it out of the window almost without an effort. I should have done so, indeed, if I had known what I know now. I remember how easy it was at that age to refuse a bottle of Guinness's stout that was offered to me for keeping the score at a country cricket match. All one has to do at that age is to say 'No'. Occasionally, one has to say 'No' twice, but to any one young

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enough to have the old Sunday-school recitation, 'Have courage, my boy, to say no', still ringing in his ears, that is not beyond achievement. At fifty, however, the case is altered. At fifty one may resolutely say 'No' with one's better nature, but the rest of one's nature will not take 'No' for an answer. The better nature says 'No'; habit says: 'You mean "Yes".' 'No,' you repeat with a false air of determination. 'You know you really mean "Yes",' persists habit. And your 'No' becomes progressively more vacillating, till at last, yielding to the pressure of that ruthless inquisitor, habit, you weakly agree, 'Well, yes, perhaps, this time, yes.' I do not wish to be pessimistic about the chances of the middle-aged and the old to reform themselves, and to live the lives they would be living if they had known at the age of fifteen what they know now. But, if not a lost cause, it is an uphill fight. Every one sympathizes with the temptations of youth, but it seems to me that the temptations of age are a much more fitting object for our sympathy. One of the most touching spectacles in the world, to my mind, is an old man of eighty-five still trying to lead a better life.

I am not yet eighty-five, but I trust that, if I survive to that age, I shall be such an old man as that. All through my life I have kept stored away somewhere a banner with 'Excelsior!' written on it, and some day I should like

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to let it stream in the air of a golden dawn, while beneath it I clamber up one of the easier foothills of virtue. Often in the past I have taken it out of its cupboard and looked at it lovingly, but, sooner or later, I have always carefully folded it up again and put it back with a sigh to await a more propitious day. I see now that I invariably misjudged the propitiousness of the day, and that, for the purpose of beginning a new life, any day will serve. I see this so clearly to-day that I feel sure that, if I had private means, I should go away somewhere and begin a new life at once. And by a new life I mean largely giving things up. There is a Puritan half-buried in me who, in some moods, defines virtue principally in terms of giving things up and whose ideal man would live in smiling indifference to the pleasures of the body, free from vanity, untempted by riches, content with bread and water, capable of walking past a tobacconist's shop.

That, I admit, is the view of only half my nature. I have no settled philosophy, and there are days on which I cannot believe that pleasure in moderation will do anybody very much harm. On such days my theory as well as my practice is on the side of all those dishes and bottles that are among the delights of civilized men. On such days I would not change places with a teetotaller or a vegetarian, but feel that the world is large enough to contain both them and

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me. On such days the non-smoker seems to me not a model to be imitated but merely the member of another race, like a mathematician. Nor do I become more certain, as I grow older, as to what is the perfect life either for myself or for any one else. I know it is a kind of wisdom, a kind of temperance, a kind of disinterestedness, but, as to what place the pleasures should fill in it, I do not know enough to advise a schoolboy. Probably I shall always be in two minds about the matter, and, while one half of me will be a convinced follower of the pleasures, the other will have a mystical hankering after the abstemious world of the teetotallers and the vegetarians.

Everybody, I believe, is at times a vegetarian at heart. I became a vegetarian at the age of five, though I had never even heard the word, and I might have continued to be one if I had not been bribed back into meat-eating by apprehensive relations. I made another attempt in later life, but my cook persisted in giving me the same dish so often—it was called ‘vegetable-marrow goose’, and was, in fact, a vegetable marrow repulsively stuffed in mockery of an honest bird—that I could not hold out against a doctor who ordered me a diet of beef and Burgundy. Yet, though no longer a practising vegetarian, I still have a kind of vegetarian faith—a belief that a lettuce is somehow a purer thing than a pig, and a dish of broad beans fitter

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food for a philosopher than the offals of the butcher's shop. There is something noble in the character of a man who can refuse turkey, and who is content with a mess of cauliflower while all around him are enjoying saddle of mutton and red-currant jelly. Say what you will, that man has a soul above pleasures. He is king of himself, unassailable by temptation, the ascetic we should all like to be.

I must warn the vegetarians, however, that they will lose the sympathy of many idealistic non-vegetarians if they allow vegetarianism to cease to be ascetic and if they attempt, as some of them now do, to prove that it is as pleasant as meat-eating. I do not wish to take to vegetarianism, teetotalism, and non-smoking as an alternative form of self-indulgence. For me they are virtues, triumphs of the spirit over the body, and, if I am to enjoy myself as much as ever among their abstentions, I may as well remain as I am. That is why I regret the publication of such a book as Mrs. Baines and Mr. Edgar Saxon's *Attractive Food Reform*. The very title suggests that Epicureanism is creeping in where Epicureanism has no right to be, and, when one opens the book, one actually finds that one of the sections is entitled 'Festive Recipes'. Here are simply the old temptations in new forms. What glutton, for instance, will not feel his worst passions stirring when he reads the 'festive recipe' for 'Ariadne's Trifle',

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one of the ingredients of which is '1 large pkt. Citrona or Cherinut'? Then there is 'Egg Nectar', the recipe of which begins riotously, 'Put into an Orzone mixer three tablespoonfuls of fresh milk.' And what virtue is there in abandoning Château Margaux for 'Vitamin Wine', the recipe for which has the alluring opening, 'Put grated raw parsnips into a piece of strong muslin, fold up corners and squeeze out the juice'? What do all these recipes suggest but joy—on with the dance—*nunc est bibendum*, and all the old Epicurean fallacies? The names of the drinks and dishes and the first sentences of the recipes might have come from the Bible of a Paradise of the senses. Take 'Paradise Beauties', for instance—'Cut some Apriola with a sharp knife into thin slices. Spread one piece with a little Nutona pinekernel butter.' Or take 'Sweet William Sandwiches'—'Cut a packet of Pearmeat into thin slices.' Or 'Grapemeat Surprise'—'Cut a packet of Grapemeat into slices quarter inch thick. Make a filling of some Curdex or cottage cheese, the juice of an orange and some coconut meal all pounded together.' And, besides these, we have recipes for 'Arcadian Jelly Pudding', 'Elysian Cream', 'Olympian Delight', 'Dionysian Peaches', 'Ambrosia'—beginning, 'Half a tumbler of fresh grape juice'—and 'Aphrodite's Cup'. Why, the gastric juices grow agitated at the very names! These are cates,

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not for pale ascetics, but for Rabelaisians roaring choruses round the table. Their place should have been in the pages of Petronius, not in a vegetarian cookery-book.

Pleasure, pleasure, pleasure—it is all the cry nowadays ; and it is clear that even vegetarians are affected by it. I am sure that if St. Anthony were living to-day and were given a copy of this book, he would find himself assailed by fiercer temptations than were known among the Fathers. How could he fast when he knew that there were Scrumpies and Munchies to be had—foods of which we are told :

These and other whole-grain specialities of the Health Centre are mentioned here because they are most convenient to have in the house ready for giving a touch of novelty and charm to any meal, especially for visitors.

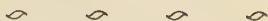
Would he not straightway plan a visit to some luxurious home where he knew he would be given Scrumpies, or, if not Scrumpies, Munchies ? A good man might become a thief for such viands. And would not the saint murmur over in his dreams the names of the foods recommended for picnics—‘ such savoury commodities as Sylvan Savoury, Sandwich Paste, Paste o’ Nuts, and Primo Paste ; and naturally sweet things, as Grapemeat, Applemeat, Brazil-Dates, Dinky Fruit Caramels (no sugar), Vivunut

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Caramels ' ? It is all too beautiful—too beautiful, I fear, to be morally right. If this be the world of abstinence, what is self-indulgence ? I cannot, I fear, become a vegetarian, if vegetarianism is to turn into an orgy. A pretty figure I should cut—should I not ?—marching uphill with my ' Excelsior ' banner in one hand and a foaming beaker of Aphrodite's Cup in the other.



## XXI. Tunnels



THESE is no denying the fascination of tunnels. We have all been under the spell since we were children. To stand at the mouth of a tunnel is to feel invited into a mystery, and to enter a tunnel is to enjoy the combined pleasures of fear and of adventure. How delightful to watch a train disappearing into a hole just large enough to admit it ! How much more delightful to venture into the hole oneself, to advance into the long darkness, and to see, just when apprehension is squeezing the last drops of boldness out of one's being, the light of safety breaking towards the farther end ! I do not know whether railway companies are so indulgent to trespassers into their tunnels as they used to be. It is a busier world nowadays, and the perils of tunnel-walking are greater. When I was a child, fortunately for me, there was a railway tunnel—we called it a mile long, but it may have been only a quarter of a mile—in which children and even their parents used to go for walks in the less dangerous hours of the week, hallooing in the darkness and exchanging jests on the subject of what they would do if an unexpected train overtook them. If you had been through the tunnel, you felt entitled to boast over one who had never been

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through it. I think, even to-day, if I met a man who had been to the little seaside town outside which the tunnel begins, I should find some occasion for asking him, 'Have you ever been through the tunnel?' and, if he answered 'No,' I should feel glad, knowing that in this respect I was his superior.

Why any one should be at the pains to investigate the gloom of a tunnel, I do not know. Earth has not anything to show less fair than the interior of that long arch of darkness. There is a certain pleasure to be had in stepping from sleeper to sleeper, if one is young enough, and the occasional cavities in which a man may take refuge from a passing railway-train excite the imagination with pictures of hairbreadth escapes. But there is no variety of scene; no flower blooms; no bird—not even an owl—stirs the darkness with voice or wing; the very wind has lost its savour. Outside, the sea falls on a long shore, and a steamer rocks at the river mouth. There is all the lovely variety of a world lit up by the sun in which to wander. There are sea-anemones in the rock-pools, and children who have never known care are engaged on their serious purposes there and on the sands. Yet all these things we leave for the half-prohibited darkness. The call of the tunnel is as irresistible as the call of the wild. The heart is not satisfied till it has tasted awe, and to a child a cave or a tunnel is more awful than the blazing fire of the sun.

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Even in later life we find it difficult to resist the invitation of a cave. We may have visited a thousand caves and have come out disappointed from them all ; but, if we find ourselves in the neighbourhood of a new cave, are we any the wiser after a thousand disappointments ? Obeying our instinct, we enter, and, striking matches, explore the gloomy hollow till the ultimate lowering of the roof. We even pay for admission to such places. If we go to Rome, we find ourselves inevitably deep under earth in the funereal maze of the Catacombs. There, perhaps, we have the excuse that we are on ground that is sacred with the memory of human suffering and human courage, and that the candles in our hands that light up the oppressive darkness also light up a page of the history of mankind. But I am sure that we should still make that melancholy peregrination even if the tunnellings were the work of nature. That we love caves for caves' sake, is proved by the unceasing stream of trippers that pours daily through the turnstiles into the caves of Cheddar.

I confess I like caves better in imagination than while I am actually exploring their marvels. I do not think I should ever have gone into the Cheddar caves if I had foreseen that long walk in the pressure of a slow-moving crowd into the bowels of the earth. I like to read about these monstrosities and marvels of nature, but I like

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to visit them as an individual who can wander about them as one wanders about an art gallery, and who can escape from them at will as soon as he is either tired or oppressed. In Cheddar caves, however, I found myself put under the iron governance of a guide, dragged in the thick of a mob farther and farther away from the sunlight, compelled to look at stalagmite and stalactite fantastically shaped like Swiss villages and whatnot, haled up steps to plunge into yet deeper caves with frozen waterfalls, longing to turn and make for air that had a taste of the sun, and yet advancing like a slave into the horrid inward parts of the mountains. I have, I suppose, a nervous loathing of being under a mountain. It weighs on my imagination till I feel a compression of the temples, and, as I have a similar sense of imprisonment in a crowd, if I cannot escape from it when I please, the more I saw of the Cheddar caves, the more I disliked them. Yet, such is my incapacity for profiting by experience, if I found myself in the neighbourhood of another famous cave to-morrow, I should find myself eagerly advancing through the turnstile, an explorer, a fool.

We can measure the hold that caves and tunnels have on our imaginations by the effect they produce on us when they are mentioned in literature. Coleridge's

Through caverns measureless to man,  
Down to a sunless sea

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is a piece of the rich gold metal of wonder, and I do not know of any cave in poetry or in legend that incites the imagination in vain. When we are young, no story of smuggling that does not contain a smugglers' cave can please, and a whole countryside becomes more exciting to us if tradition tells of a cave in a field to which the opening is no longer known and which was once used as the hiding-place of treasure. What an excellent use, again, Rider Haggard made of the mystery and terror of underground caverns in *Alan Quatermain* ! Do we not still pay to see the mimicry of such wonders at our Wembleys ? As for the tunnel, it has come gloriously into its own again in the film-play and in the fiction of crookery. I have read two sensational novels during the week in which the hero and heroine were trapped with all but fatal results in a secret subway that led from the villain's headquarters to the street. Never does the heart beat faster than when a heroic detective, having at last discovered the tunnel and penetrated its evil depths alone, hears a hollow laugh in the darkness behind him and the door that makes him a prisoner closing. If the criminal parts of London really contain so many underground passages as the writers of fiction say, Lord Byng has a difficult task before him. Every Bolshevik agent with a lust for world-power is apparently able to build himself a tunnel unobserved. It seems to be as easy for a

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Chinese dope-seller to get hold of a London house with a secret tunnel leading to the street as to buy an evening paper. Homicidal maniacs, too, are always able to discover a tunnel, unknown to any one else, that enables them to reach the people they wish to murder. Either sensational fiction is untrue to life or London contains a vast population of criminal troglodytes.

With this passion for tunnels and caverns, it is not to be wondered at that human beings have again and again played with the fancy of a Channel Tunnel. We have tunnelled under the earth and under the rivers : why not under the sea ? Many an English child has dug a hole in the back garden in the hope of reaching Australia, and is it not even pleasanter to dream of digging a hole in Kent in the hope of reaching the Riviera ? To those who are possessed by the dream of a Channel Tunnel, the construction of that long, elongated, unsceneried hole seems like the last step into a perfect world. To this they are willing to sacrifice all the beauty of dancing waves, all the sweet influences of the summer gale, all the delight of the prospect of French houses rising behind the harbour with their smiling message of reassurance. For myself, if the Channel Tunnel is ever built, I doubt if I shall use it. I like tunnels, but I do not like them deep, and I should never feel happy with the sea on top of me. The

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Blackwall Tunnel is as deep as I care to venture. I remember, before I had ever been in Italy, I greatly disliked the notion of going under the Alps, and, if I could afford it, I should still prefer to enter Italy by the same route as Hannibal. A tunnel for motorists, an arterial tunnel, with petrol-pumps and tea-shops along the wayside, whether under the Alps or between England and France—that would be another matter. But no one ever proposes anything sensible.

## XXII. At Lord's      ~      ~      ~      ~

IT was pleasant for those who were at Lord's on Saturday to read in Monday's *Times* that they had been the spectators of a day's play that would be famous in the history of cricket. Not that I had been in any doubt of this by the time Bradman had scored a hundred. But one's own certainties are worth little till they are confirmed by an expert. I do not think I am alone in being doubly confident of an opinion if I see it authoritatively endorsed in print. Hence, when I read *The Times*, it was like hearing a piece of good news to be told that I had been the witness of an historic event.

I confess that there was no air of historic greatness in the play when it began. England's tail was batting, and, as the score was already over 400, there was little tension of hope or fear. It was enjoyable to watch White and Duckworth making so light of the Australian bowling, Duckworth crouching oddly over his bat as if he were suffering from cramp in the stomach; and it was interesting for any one who had not previously seen Wall bowling to observe him as he walked half-way to the pavilion in order to take the longest run that any bowler can ever have taken as a means of putting speed into the ball. But one—at least,



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I—did not really care very much what was happening. I was fairly certain that either England would win or that the match would end in a draw. We were merely watching a spectacle, and it was not particularly spectacular. Besides, the sun was grillingly hot. The stand in which I was sitting was sheltered from a breeze that was strong enough at times to blow the shirts of the players into balloons, and, where I sat, a sullen and almost breathless heat was reflected from underfoot. When a bald man took off his hat to gain a moment's relief, you could see the goutts of sweat on his skull. I have never seen so many human beings sitting perfectly still and sweating as if they were working like navvies. Occasionally a cloud passed over the sun and a faint draught came, but, for the most part, I was in misery. I watched the field with a jaundiced eye, and began to wonder whether the grass at Lord's was as green as it used to be. That beautiful plain, once so refreshing to the eye, was refreshing no longer.

If one could feel little excitement while England was batting, the beginning of the Australian innings was a positive torture to watch. A man said to me the other day, referring to a slow-scoring batsman: 'If you really know cricket, there's nothing you enjoy better than to see a good solid defence against good bowling, even when no runs are being

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scored.' I unfortunately do not really know cricket. I once played it very badly, feeling lucky and happy if I hit the ball at all, and in the seventh heaven if I hit it over the railings or broke a window (price two-and-sixpence). As for the fine points of the game, I knew, and know, nothing of them. As a spectator, I like to see the ball hit hard and hit often. I have seldom time to go to a match, and, when I do, I wish it to be a spectacle, and I feel that I have been cheated if it proceeds with the slow and scientific deliberation of a game of chess. I can never join in the cheers with which a section of the spectators always greets a maiden over. I should like to see a maiden over counting against the batting side in the score. My notion of purgatory is to sit and watch Hammond bowling maiden overs to Woodfull; I had several foretastes of purgatory on Saturday.

Not that I wish to say a word against Woodfull. Woodfull, I know, was right, and I was wrong. But, though I have seldom yawned at a cricket match, how I yawned on Saturday as he and Ponsford set themselves to the task of exhausting the English bowlers under a burning sun! Never have I seen such cruelty to bowlers, such cruelty to spectators. To bowl against Woodfull in such circumstances must be as heart-breaking as bowling at a wicket guarded by an iron screen. He seemed to be

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content not to score runs if, in return for this, Tate and Allen did not take wickets. If the bowling had been the greatest bowling on earth he could not have treated it with greater caution. And what made his play all the more wearisome to the spectators was the suspicion that the bowling was not even the best bowling in England. At one time when, after a long interval, he scored a run, some of the spectators cheered derisively, and one of them called out, 'Go on, Lindrum !' That first hour, in which he scored, I think, nine, was one of the greatest ordeals which an impatient and ignorant spectator can ever have been subjected to in a cricket ground.

Yet who, looking back on the day's play, can doubt that Woodfull was the hero who, above all, won the game for his side ? What heroism can be greater than that of a man who does not mind boring thousands of people by the hour in order to achieve his end ? There is an admirable genius in this. It is delightful to think of, if not to witness. And, if the batting was dull, there was always the English fielding to delight the lover of the spectacular. The way in which the huge Chapman can shoot out an elastic arm to stop an invisible ball that no other human being could have reached will, I am sure, always be talked of in the history of cricket. It is easier to understand the caution of Woodfull and Ponsford when one recalls

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those cat-like springs. And, with Hobbs, Hammond, and Hendren almost as alert, and with Robins racing like a greyhound again and again to pick up the ball just as it was about to pass the boundary, even the most aggressive batsman would have found it difficult to score rapidly. If Woodfull and Ponsford did not score rapidly, however, they had by the end of three hours defeated the spectators. I doubt if there were a hundred people in the ground who had not by that time resigned themselves to seeing these two men batting stolidly for the rest of the day. For the most part, the spectators around me were muttering, 'If Larwood had been here!' or 'If Freeman had been here!' or 'Why don't they put on Hobbs?' If I were Chapman I would try everybody. I have seen Hobbs taking wickets at the Oval,' or 'Why doesn't he try Woolley?' or 'Why doesn't he put on Duleep?' It was impossible not to admire Tate as he ran up, time and again, to put all the strength of his powerful shoulders into an attempt to break down a defence that was impregnable. But the bowlers and fielders were almost the only people in the ground who seemed to remain as confident as ever that the Australians could be got out. Occasionally a group of spectators would begin an exultant shout under the impression that one of the batsmen had been caught or was out leg-before-wicket; but it always died away into

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a self-conscious laugh. Woodfull and Ponsford were not giving catches.

In some curious fashion the game as it went on ceased to be boring. The young men who stood on benches from which they could see over the heads of the spectators in the lower stands remained there hour after hour, as if they were afraid of missing a stroke. When I went out to the bar to quench my thirst it was as empty as the Sahara. The interest of a race even entered the game. Woodfull's score began steadily to creep up towards that of Ponsford, who had for a time far outdistanced him. But one wished rather than believed that one of them would go out. When, after the King had arrived and shaken hands with the players, Ponsford was caught by Hammond, it was as unexpected as an accident. It brought great relief to many spectators who had been trying for hours to encourage themselves by saying, 'That one puzzled him', or 'He didn't quite know what to do there'; but, if any one had been puzzled during the partnership of Woodfull and Ponsford it was not the batsmen but the bowlers and the spectators.

When Bradman came out of the pavilion with his bat you could have guessed that he was a man of genius even if you had never heard of him. Or, at least, you could have guessed that he had an individuality out of the common. There was character even in the

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set of his cap and in the way his collar was turned up. I see that one authority declares that Bradman is a craftsman rather than an artist, but though as a rule I bow to authority in such matters, no one will ever convince me that any one but a great artist could afford such delight to the inexpert with his strokes. In the occasional cricket that I have seen, I have never seen a batsman whose play seemed to me more astonishingly delightful than his except Macartney. Bradman has not the all but ballet-dancer's grace of action that Macartney had ; but what an artist this little light-haired man is in the force and variety of his strokes ! He has all the daring of a slogger along with a deadly skill that makes it safe for him to treat a great player's bowling as if it were a schoolboy's. Even the best collection of fielders, when he is batting, are no longer a scarcely passable barrier, but he sees a hundred lanes through them, along one of which he can flash a ball to the boundary. Woodfull and Ponsford had withstood England ; Bradman mastered it. And secure and conscious mastery of this kind is the crown of genius. By the time he had scored 50 I am sure that even the most ardent pro-English spectator in the ground would have been bitterly disappointed if he had gone out. Batting like this is something outside partisanship. It is a spectacle such as no one can expect to see often in a

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lifetime. Bowler after bowler was tried against him ; he made most of them look ordinary and Woolley look comic. He exhausted the bowlers ; he exhausted the fielders, whom he kept on a perpetual run ; he exhausted himself so that, when Woodfull was stumped, he sank over his bat like an oarsman who has collapsed after a race. But he did not exhaust the spectators. They forgot the heat of the day ; they forgot to care who won. They asked for nothing better than that this should go on for ever. That Bradman had scored 155 not out when he fled to the pavilion at the end of the game with the spectators flying after him was a cause, not of despair, but of delight even to those who wanted England to win. They had seen a master in the hour of his inspiration. They had been the privileged spectators of an innings that they knew in their hearts would live in the history of the game.

### XXIII. A Dangerous Disease      ∩      ∩

ONE of the most impressive characteristics of the present age is the calmness with which human beings accept the inevitability of death and disaster on the roads. When the motor-car was fairly new, a motorist could scarcely run over a hen without being the theme of objurgations. The word 'road-hog' was used as a synonym for 'motorist' in a thousand leading articles, and the ordinary motorist who went fast enough to overtake an old-age pensioner in a country lane drew upon himself the hatred of all good citizens. The pedestrian point of view was triumphant, and motorists had as little sympathy as have 'foreign devils' in China.

Nowadays, all this is changed. The pedestrian still utters an occasional squeak about his rights in a letter to an editor. He protests that it is he and not the motorist who has the first right to the road—that the motorist has no right either to run into him or to run over him; but no one any longer attends to the querulous pedestrian. Everybody knows that his ancient rights are gone and that if he does not wish to be killed or maimed, his place is frequently in the hedge.

Unfortunately, it is not only pedestrians who



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are killed in accidents on the road. Almost anybody, whether on foot or in a car, has a reasonable chance of being killed, and, indeed, 5,551 persons were killed in such accidents in Great Britain in 1928. There has probably never been a death-roll on this scale accepted with similar equanimity. A single railway accident or a fire, in which the number of the dead reaches two figures, is a sensation of the day. During the war, when half a dozen people were killed in an air raid, three-fourths of the English nation denounced the Germans as 'baby-killers'. I do not know the statistics of the air-raid casualties, but I fancy they were a trifle compared with the statistics of deaths on the road. Yet, when we read the list of week-end motoring disasters in Monday's paper, we feel neither alarm nor indignation. We are as philosophic about it as about a flood in China. We accept it with fortitude, as though we felt that such a condition of things is inevitable, and the less said about it the better.

Yet, so far as I can judge from what I have seen on the roads, there is no inevitability about ninety-nine accidents in a hundred. There are scarcely any inevitable road accidents except those due to a failure of machinery, and most even of these are not inevitable. There is nothing so easily preventable as road accidents. I have prevented a hundred myself by avoiding fools. I have also almost caused three which

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were prevented by other people avoiding a fool. The astonishing thing is, indeed, that with the number of fools driving motor-cars foolishly—and we need not put it above one per cent of the entire number of motorists—accidents are so few.

Authorities on the matter constantly discuss the question whether the person most to blame for road accidents is the pedestrian, the slow driver, or the fast driver. It is absurd, however, to attribute all accidents to one cause. The pedestrian, no doubt, is a nuisance, and one would often be justified in running him down if one had a cow-catcher in front of one's car. But the pedestrian as a rule is a source of irritation rather than of peril, and I confess that, when I read the story of an inquest on a pedestrian, I usually feel that the coroner's acceptance of the motorist's explanation as to why he ran over him errs on the side of good-nature. Coroners seem to me, on the whole, extraordinarily kind to the living. The dead, it is true, are dead, and can suffer no further injury. But, even so, it is a little astonishing that it should be so much safer, at the present day, to kill a man with a motor-car than with any other instrument.

It is not easy to believe that this particular method of killing will always be regarded so lightly. It is, on the whole, the method of killing for which there is least excuse. One

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does not run into a pedestrian or a fellow-motorist because one hates him, or because one wants his money, or for any other of the reasons for which men have killed men since the beginning of the world. There is no reason for killing him at all, indeed, except that he happens to be in one's way. Pedestrians do not kill each other for such a reason, nor do people in shops or theatres. If they did there would be an outcry in the papers. But the motorist, unlike the pedestrian, is regarded as a helpless fellow, not quite responsible for his actions and, except in very extreme cases, we do not even look on the killing of a fellow-creature by him as an action suggestive of negligence.

Yet, there is no doubt, that if motorists behaved with as much good sense as pedestrians, accidents would be very few. There is, I believe, no legal speed limit for pedestrians. The pedestrian may walk to Brighton at any speed he pleases. He may walk anywhere at any speed he pleases which is consistent with the freedom of other pedestrians. In crowded streets, such as the Strand, however, he automatically slows down his pace and makes no desperate effort to create walking records, such as would inconvenience every one else on the pavement. If pedestrians were as eager to pass each other in the Strand as some motorists are to pass each other on the roads, there would

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be such jostlings, such collisions, such tramp-lings on feet, that there would be free fights in the street every five minutes. Yet, good sense and good manners have sufficiently prevailed in the streets of our cities to make a severe collision between one pedestrian and another a rare occurrence.

If the number of motor-cars on the road is going to increase to the point that seems likely, either the motorists will have to imitate the pedestrians in this respect or we shall have more men, women, and children dying as a result of motor accidents every year than as a result of a dangerous epidemic. It is not that motorists necessarily travel too fast. Almost every one nowadays agrees that, in certain circumstances, sixty miles an hour is a perfectly safe pace. The only dangerous motorist is the motorist who travels to the inconvenience of others. He feels that his car is capable of a certain speed, and he is impatient every instant at which he is unable to achieve that speed, whether in crooked lanes or on crowded by-passes. Now, the roads of England happen, by good luck, to be crooked roads with innumerable bends, and most of them were never intended for fast driving. It is certainly exasperating to find oneself on such a road behind a slow lorry and with a continuous flow of traffic coming in the opposite direction, which makes it impossible to pass the lorry without danger of a crash.

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But, apart from impatience, there is no valid reason for passing everything on the road. Not one man in a million is in such a desperate hurry as hundreds of motorists think they are. Motoring, however, is still enough of a novelty to be associated with the spirit of racing, and most people who have driven have felt this—the desire to pass, the shame of being passed. Motoring has not yet become a normal method of progression like walking, in which we philosophically adapt ourselves to the pace of our fellows. Hence there are many drivers who will swing past other cars at sharp corners, and who even, when they see one car passing another, will sweep round past both, though it involves holding up some motorist who is coming in the other direction. They drive with an exhilaration akin to drunkenness, and, indeed, it is a question whether the more dangerous driver is one who is under the influence of liquor or one who is intoxicated with the mania of hurry. We should regard a Rugby three-quarter who charged at full speed on foot along the Piccadilly pavement, knocking into people and inconveniencing everybody he met, as a lunatic; yet the Rugby footballer would merely be making full use of his speed in the same way in which the worst kind of motorist makes use of his.

Not that the fast motorist is the only danger on the roads. There is a kind of slow motorist

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who might reasonably be sent to join him in penal servitude. He crawls along the crowded roads, looking on every one who wishes to pass him as an enemy. He draws to the side if a motor-car meets him, but he will not draw aside to let a motor-car pass him. It is impossible to pass him without risking an accident ; but, human nature being what it is, it is impossible not to try to pass him. I have seen him described by motoring journalists as the ' real road-hog ', and as he once nearly cost me my life I am inclined to agree with the verdict.

How the roads can be cleared of the motorists and pedestrians who cause accidents, I have no notion. I am sure, however, that we shall never discover the remedy till we have become more excited about the disease. We live in a sensational age, and surely we might recognize as somewhat sensational the deaths of tens of thousands of people all over the world every year in accidents for which there is scarcely an excuse. What I should like to see is a good panic about the roads, such as the doctors occasionally try to raise about small-pox. Motoring is really far more dangerous than small-pox. And its dangers are even more easily averted. But we are not yet sufficiently alarmed to avert them.

## XXIV. The Active Life      ~      ~      ~

AN admirer of the bold and adventurous, I have never myself been either bold or adventurous. As a child, I neither ran away to sea nor wished to run away to sea. I was proud to sit on the knee of a soldier who had been besieged in Kandahar and to be allowed to wear his medals, but, from all I could gather from his talk, there was nothing in Kandahar that should make a child in search of happiness prefer it to Elmwood Avenue. My nurse often made my heart beat with stories of Protestant martyrs left bound to a stake where they would be slowly drowned by the rising tide : I revered but had no desire to emulate them. A missionary clubbed to death as he landed on a cannibal island I could read about with rapture, but I had never any impulse as a result to go converting cannibals. Even in the smaller exploits of daring, I was happiest where least boldness was called for. I never voluntarily robbed an orchard in my life. Climbing walls and running away at a shout of ' Nix ! ' was to me not a sport but a torment. In the game of Follow-my-Leader, which involved dropping from high walls and trespassing in the gardens of potentially irate ogres, I was never the high-spirited leader but always the reluctant follower.



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If I was offered a ride on a horse, I did not stand out for the friskiest, most spirited horse in the stable, but was perfectly happy on the back of a good-natured animal with large hairy feet that would jog along the road at a scarcely greater pace than if he were between the shafts of a cart. A great lover of the heroic in man, I was content to love it as a spectator. I can at the moment, indeed, recall only three circumstances in which for a considerable time I longed to emerge from spectatordom and to play the part of a hero. For many years I wished to be an Orange drummer, flogging a drum bigger than myself till my wrists bled on the rims. Later, when I fell in love for the first time, I had as urgent a longing to fling myself at the reins of a runaway horse just as he was about to plunge over a precipice with an extraordinarily beautiful girl on his back. And, about the same time, I would (theoretically) have gladly given an arm or a leg, or both, to score the winning try for my school in the great match of the year. Alas, when I turned out in a junior practice game, I seemed merely to get in the way of the other players, to be pushed and tramped over sometimes by my own side and sometimes by the other, never getting near the ball, but seized and shaken and flung into the mud all the same. It was brought home to me, even by my dearest friend, that as a footballer I was a mere cumberer of the ground.



## The Active Life

Hence, from this last possible field of heroism I also retired, becoming more and more of a spectator as the years settled on me with their weight of cares.

Whatever I did in the world of action, I did badly. I played tennis badly. I played cricket badly. I should not have minded not excelling, but who would persevere if, no matter what he was engaged on, he was conspicuously the last in the race, an incompetent among experts? Who would have persisted in dancing, for example, if he had danced so badly as I? Nor should I ever have learned to skate if it had not been for a memorable winter that froze not only the canals but the largest lakes, when the entire human race took to the ice and there was no company to be had away from it. One proof of the extent to which I had by then resigned the desire for an active life is that I never learned to ride a bicycle—that I never even wished to learn to do so. I have never ridden a bicycle till the present day—and I shall never ride one now.

It is all the more curious that, with the approach of middle age, the desire to do things instead of merely seeing more competent people doing them suddenly stirred in me. It began, I think, with gardening. No doubt I dug as badly as I danced, but when once I had thrust a spade into the earth with my foot, I would not have resigned it to the most expert gardener

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in Christendom, even though I knew that he would grow twenty lettuces where I should probably grow none. In middle age one is content to do things without doing them well. Many a plot of fine potatoes—Arran Chiefs and Edzell Blues—did I make all but barren, but to contend with the earth is its own reward, and a bad gardener, like a bad poet, is, I am sure, as happy in his work as a good one. Then came playing the pianola. That was even more energetic than gardening, yielding, perhaps, also more of the pure joy of creation. And so from one activity to another—playing boule and roulette in foreign casinos, playing slosh, going over the falls at Wembley, dog-racing, and, at last, the top of all, golf with its flying dreams. The active life, it is clear, is an inclined plane, on which one must not set one's feet unless one is prepared to progress down it with ever-increasing momentum. I realized this later when I found myself at the wheel of a motor-car, not to be disheartened though I had swerved into a bank or backed into a ditch, not to be deterred by shouts of 'You —— fool!' from some passing road-hog—grimly resolved to conquer or to run into some one in the attempt. Had you told me twenty years ago that, at the stroke of fifty, I should be accomplishing feats of speed beyond the reach of the charioteers of Pharaoh, I should have laid my overdraft at the bank to a penny that you were

## The Active Life

a false prophet. But it has happened. I do not know how, but it has happened. Not exactly a Segrave, I am, nevertheless, a man of action.

And the question is whether I can stop. Are there new fields of activity still to be conquered? I myself am content, but is Destiny satisfied? Who knows? The other day I received from the firm from which I bought my car a letter which informed me that they had now 'entered the aviation field'. 'By that,' they explained, 'is meant that we have made arrangements for supplying our customers with aeroplanes in the same expeditious manner that we now supply cars.' And they went on to offer me one of two light aeroplanes, adding: 'We can give practically immediate delivery of either model, and provide you with tuition, arrange to take a car in part exchange, and can fix up hire-purchase terms.' At the moment, I tell myself I will have nothing to do with it. But I once said the same about wireless and motor-cars. I detest the very idea of flying, but I once detested the idea of driving a car through traffic. After all, to rise from the ground like a bird, to soar into a region where there are no pedestrians, no cyclists, no ten-mile limits, no traffic blocks—to travel faster than a Bentley—how temptingly the devil of activity baits his hook! I don't like the idea, and yet in a

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way—‘ Up above the clouds so high.’ A little giddy, perhaps, and yet—— Be merciful, Destiny, to a middle-aged man. ‘ Museum 7734. Could you tell me the price of a de Haviland Moth ? £700 ? Thank you.’ Well, thank heaven I haven’t £700.

## XXV. The Sneak Guest      ∪      ∪      ∪

SEVERAL correspondents have been writing to *The Times* on the subject of the 'sneak guest'. This is, apparently, a newly-invented term describing a person who visits a house as a guest and afterwards conveys the secrets of the dinner-table to a newspaper. It is clear that if this is done on a large scale it constitutes a grave threat to social life. If there is a spy at every dinner-table, there will soon be an end of conversation, and the strong silent Englishman will become more silent than ever. A few people might talk still more brilliantly if a sneak guest were known to be present, but for the most part men would be chary of expressing an opinion that might be broadcast to the world in the course of a day or two. Personal gossip would cease. The fount of scandal would dry up. Wise men would, so far as was possible, confine their remarks to the weather, books and public affairs, and their comments even on books and on public affairs would insensibly become more colourless than they are at present. This might make for greater charity, but it would also make for greater dullness. We are generally most charitable and least interesting when we think we are being overheard.

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I have myself the greatest detestation of being overheard. There is little danger of this owing to the faintness of my voice, but I endure all the agonies of it when I find myself in a railway-carriage with a loud-voiced acquaintance who persists in bellowing intimacies about my friends in the hearing of strangers. 'Is Wogg drinking as much as ever?' 'Don't you find his wife a fearful bore?' 'I've just been spending a week-end with the Wuggs. Did you ever meet such loathsome children?' I refuse to answer such questions honestly before an audience. If I am to give my candid opinion of Wogg's wife and Wugg's children, it must be out of hearing of the world at large. And, even behind locked doors, I should be chary of telling the truth save to a chosen few, who could be trusted not to announce a few hours later: 'Y. was saying that Wogg's wife is a perfectly repellent creature.' There are odious chatterboxes who cannot say an unpleasant thing about a fellow human being without attributing it to some one else, however insignificant. Hence I make it a point to deny in as loud a voice as I can manage all accusations against my friends, their wives, and their families, except in the company of friends who are dearer still.

The truth is, very little of one's conversation is meant for repetition. Most of it is too dull to repeat. Much of what is interesting enough

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to repeat ought not to be repeated. We repeat it, of course, not to every ear, but to a suitable ear, and so gossip grows. And, so long as it does not get into print, everybody is the happier for it except some one who hears that a friend has said something that he never said at all. If half the things that are said in London every night were printed there would be a million libel actions. Friendships would be broken, and vanity would turn to misery. It is strange that the printed word should seem so much more deadly than the spoken, but there is no denying that a thing looks much more serious in print than it sounds on the smiling lips of a scandalmonger. If it were not so, we should not see such strenuous efforts made on certain occasions to 'keep it out of the papers'. To appear in the papers in an unflattering light is the modern counterpart of standing in the pillory.

I wonder, however, whether the 'sneak guest' whom the correspondents of *The Times* have been abusing, is really much addicted to pillorying his fellow-creatures. I read a good many newspapers, including the columns of personal gossip, and I see few examples of that 'impudent and spiteful gossip' that is apparently causing hostesses concern. On the contrary, I gather from a cursory reading of these columns that London hostesses without exception are as witty as they are beautiful, and that

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their guests are the most dazzling and fascinating creatures on earth. If the 'sneak guest' meets a young author at table, he invariably depicts him as a man of genius, and the author could not be better served if he paid for the paragraph as an advertisement. Whether it is due to the mellowing influence of the food and wine, I do not know, but the 'sneak guest' seems to me to take a far more idealistic view of the human race than is warranted by the facts. Never does he allow himself a momentary lapse into ruthless realism. Never do we read: 'Among London hostesses Lady Gadd easily distinguishes herself by providing the worst food and the worst conversation. She has a positive genius for surrounding her table with company that might have been chosen at random from a home for imbeciles.' Never do we get such a paragraph as: 'I met the Earl of —— last night at Lady ——'s. What a hideous creature he is, to be sure—more like a baboon than a human being! His table manners struck me as most unpleasant and his sense of humour as non-existent. He makes idiotic jokes, and laughs at them in a high-pitched cackle that makes one long to scream.' Nor do we read of a young author: 'Mr. —— is a very tedious young man who talked about himself till we were all on the point of exhaustion. He made several attempts at epigram, all of them failures. If his books are as stupid



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as his conversation, he ought one day to become famous—as a bore.’ No, the ‘sneak guest’ is too romantic, too wise perhaps, to see life in such colours as these. He writes for a public that loves to admire, and that likes to believe that everybody who goes out to dinner in the West End of London is the worthy inhabitant of a Paradise. If there are Suetoniuses and Zolas in society, you do not, it seems to me, find them among the writers of personal journalism. You might as well look for realism in the coloured supplement to a Christmas number.

Nor, indeed, is there likely in any circumstances to be an outburst of malicious personalia in English journalism. The laws of libel are too severe, and, apart from this, it is not easy to write gossip for the Press without the fact becoming known, and a man or woman who wrote maliciously would soon cease to be invited to dinner-parties. As it is, everybody knows that most of the people who are written about in the Press like to be written about. There are a few old-fashioned people who still avoid publicity, but the ordinary human being enjoys it as Horace enjoyed being pointed out in the street. The chief difficulty of the personal journalist to-day, I fancy, is not that the doors of certain houses are closed to him, but that he is invited to far more dinners than one human being can eat. There has during

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the last generation been a rush to the camera on the part of society. Photographers are not knocked down by indignant aristocrats at Ascot, nor are the police telephoned for when a camera appears at a fashionable garden party. *The Times* correspondents have presented only one side of the question. Those who love the camera and the personal paragraph have naturally remained mute. But they are probably in the majority.

As for the journalist who betrays the secrets of the dinner-table, I am sure he is as rare to-day as he has ever been. The English journalist is the discreetest of mortals, and seldom publishes ten per cent of what he hears. A statesman told me some time ago that, in all his experience of journalists, he had never known one of them to betray a secret. You will find evidence of the same discretion in most of the personal columns. If the secrets of the dinner-table were being constantly given away, there would surely be protests from the leaders of society. Yet no eminent man or woman has publicly denounced this alleged outrage on the decencies. The conclusion I draw from this is that the baser kind of personal gossip is no commoner to-day than in the past. There were more scandalous personalia in the Press a hundred years ago than there are to-day. Even in the Late Victorian era, there were papers containing personal columns full of such

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paragraphs as : ‘ Did the peer’s son whose hat was used as a punch-bowl at the residence of a well-known actress last week call back for it later ? ’ It is true that one was never told who the peer’s son was, and most of the situations were probably invented. But, if I remember right, there was also a paper purporting to be devoted to the doings of society, which did not hesitate to publish scandalous paragraphs about people by name. This scurrility has for the most part vanished, and society and journalists have now settled down into a mutual admiration society. We learn more about women’s jewels than about their faults of character. Most of the gossip about them, so far as I have read it, is as harmless, if as trivial, as the descriptions of their dresses.

Hence I doubt whether a new pestilence has really been born in the contemporary world. The picture of society infested by a thousand sneaks is, I believe, a work of the imagination. As for the so-called sneaks who do exist, I am sure they have only to form themselves publicly into a Sneak-Guests’ Club in order to become the most sought-after guests in London.

## XXVI. On Being Right      ∩      ∩      ∩

SOME weeks ago a correspondent took me to task for misquoting Charles Kingsley. I had quoted the line, 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever', and commented on the oddity of Kingsley's implied assumption that cleverness could be had for the asking. My critic retorted that Kingsley had never made the assumption, since he had never written the line I quoted. Kingsley, he declared, knowing the mental capacity of the little girl he was addressing, had with perfect common sense begun his poem: 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever'. I will not say that you could have knocked me down with a feather when I read this, but I was as greatly surprised as most of the people who say that you could have knocked them down with a feather. It is true that I had often heard the line: 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever', but I had never thought that it was Kingsley's. I had always understood that it was written by a Late Victorian parodist—a cynic making fun of a moralist. It seemed to me impossible that a poet could be so tactless in giving advice to a little girl. The version I quoted at least flattered the little girl with the assumption that she could be clever enough if she chose. The

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alternative version humiliated her by suggesting that it was useless for her to try to be clever. This may be defended as honest ; and no serious philosopher will deny the superiority of goodness to cleverness. Still, if I were a girl with no jot of cleverness I should not like the fact to be emphasized in this fashion. It is as if a bishop, at a prize distribution, on presenting a prize to a rather plain girl, were to try to encourage her by reminding the audience that, after all, ' beauty is only skin deep '. Not thus is the loveliness of virtue made acceptable to the young.

Unable to believe that Kingsley had been so tactless, I took down his poems and turned to the lines from which I had quoted, and there, sure enough, it was as my critic had said. The lines that were in my memory :

Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever ;  
Do noble things, not dream them all day long,

were not there ; but, instead of them, I read what seemed to me the inferior lines :

Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever ;  
Do lovely things, not dream them all day long.

Still incredulous, I took down anthology after anthology, but found that none of them contained the poem except one which gave the same version as the *Collected Poems*. Even

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then I was not entirely convinced, and, if I were not lazy, I should have gone to the London Library and looked through various editions of Kingsley to see whether at some period he had not written the lines as I had always heard them. I was still intending to do this when a writer in the *Observer* saved me the trouble by stating that Kingsley had in fact originally written 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever', but that, seeing the flaw in it, he had afterwards altered 'will' to 'can'. If he did, it seems to me that he substituted a flaw in poetry for a flaw in sense.

I was charmed, however, to find that after all I was right. If the writer in the *Observer* was right, then both my critic was right and I was right—a good kind of ending to any argument. Whether it is good for the soul to be proved right is another matter. There is nothing more subtly demoralizing than the passion for being right. It is an admirable thing to desire to be right about something in the present or future; but the desire to have been right about everything in the past is another thing. It is a desire from which, I confess, I am not immune. If I have made a mistake, and it is discovered, my sensations are for the moment extremely unpleasant. If I could, by putting a slight twist on the matter, make a colourable case for having been right after all, I should not shrink from casuistry.

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Not that my casuistry would be deliberate ; I should be in a mood of self-defence in which I could easily believe in any argument that suited my purpose. So at least I infer from certain incidents in the past. I remember, for example, on one occasion, accusing Mr. Wells of having compared Henry James to a hippopotamus trying to pick up a pea. Mr. Wells pointed out that he had done nothing of the sort, but that what he had compared Henry James to was a hippopotamus picking up a pea with the most ingenious skill. I replied that I could see no serious difference between his phrase and my version of it—that each of them suggested equally well the fact to which I was referring, that Mr. Wells appeared to think that what Henry James had done in fiction was scarcely worth doing. And at the time I believed what I wrote. It is clear to me now, however, that Mr. Wells was right and I was wrong. A hippopotamus trying to pick up a pea gives the picture of a fumbler. A hippopotamus picking up a pea is an image that suggests an astonishing feat of genius in its own sphere. Yet, knowing this, I cannot be sure that, if I were in a controversy to-morrow, I should not fall into similar errors of statement and afterwards defend them with the same blind sincerity. If ever you see me engaged in a controversy, look out for casuistries. If there are enough good arguments on my side, I may



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be content with these, but if the arguments on my side are weak I may at any moment, without knowing it, turn juggler. I have noticed the same tendency in other controversialists. They have the same insensate passion for being right as I have, and they have the same capacity for persuading themselves that they have been right when they have been wrong.

A writer is, of course, at a considerable disadvantage when he is accused of error. His words are in print, and he cannot disown them, as he can disown statements made merely in conversation. His printed word is evidence against him if he attempts to twist its meaning, and there is a point at which he will no longer be able to defend his perpetual rightness without becoming ridiculous. In conversation, however, the man who is always right labours under no such restrictions. He may have prophesied a sweeping Conservative victory at the last General Election, but if, in order to cast doubt on the accuracy of his prophecy about the result of the next General Election, I remind him of this, he will exclaim, with a look of pain and indignation : ' My dear Y., what a curious memory you must have ! Don't you remember how in this very room I told you precisely what was going to happen—that Ramsay would come out top but without a clear majority, that the Conservatives would be a good second, and that the Liberals would do infinitely worse than any



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one except myself expected. My dear fellow,' he will assure me, dropping into a tone of gentle remonstrance, 'you must be thinking of some one else.' And the remarkable thing is that he will sincerely believe what he says. The man who is always right looks at the past not through his memory so much as through his imagination, imagination which is as useful as a pair of fists in the art of self-defence. I know a good many men and women who are richly endowed with this gift of imaginative memory in regard to their past words and actions. Some of them are the salt of the earth, but it is impossible to reason with them. They are for the most part chameleons in their opinions—opinions about people and opinions about things—and they will not allow the validity of their latest opinion to be tested by reference to the different opinion which was confidently expressed by them a year ago. They do not even recognize their earlier opinions when reminded of them, and I know a woman who, if you quote one of her discarded opinions to her, is capable of replying: 'Why, I remember perfectly well. It was you who said that yourself.'

It is, it must be admitted, a nagging sort of thing to be always throwing people's past opinions at their heads, and it is even a form of cruelty to chameleons. At the same time, if a friend bursts into enthusiastic praise of

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some one whom he described a few months ago as a mean and self-centred scoundrel who would steal the pennies from a blind man's tin, it is only human nature to ask him what has happened to make him alter his opinion. Human nature, but, if he is a man who is always right, absolutely useless. The answer you will probably get will be an indignant: 'Alter my opinion? I liked the fellow from the moment I set eyes on him. Trust me, I may be a fool in lots of ways, but I never make mistakes about men.'

Well, it must be pleasant to be always right. I have been, as I say, once right myself, and I know how charming a sensation it induces. But to be right always—that must be like walking on air. Happy the few who live in this perpetual luxury! Or are they so few after all? I could myself name one, two, three, four, five . . .

## XXVII. What the Typewriter Wrote <

A FEW days ago I bought a typewriter, not for myself but for a young relative. It was a second-hand machine, and, as I picked it up in its case to carry it home, the man who sold it to me said : ' That machine has rather an interesting history. Its last owner was Mr. ———, ' and he named a famous and deservedly popular novelist, who has written almost as many books as Mr. Edgar Wallace, and concerning whom the question is continually being asked : " How does he manage to write all those books ? " On my way home I went into a teashop, and, as I sat waiting for tea and a large brown cake called an Othello, I heard a curious ticking noise coming from the floor where I had deposited the typewriter. As the noise continued, my neighbours began to look at me nervously, as though they suspected me of carrying about an infernal machine. I felt nervous myself, for I am no hero in presence of the uncanny, and I could think of none but a magical explanation of the persistent click-click of the instrument. Feeling both self-conscious and a little timid, I hurried through tea, leaving the Othello half uneaten, and went out of the shop with a sense of being pierced by a hundred suspicious eyes. So much noise was the

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typewriter making that I did not dare to take it into a bus, but jumped into the first taxi that came along. It went on making the noise all the way home. The taxi-driver looked at me curiously as I was feeling in my pocket for the fare, with the thing in my hand clicking away like a nuthatch, and I paid him double fare in order to lull his suspicions. On getting into the house, I unlocked the case, and gingerly lifted the cover off the machine. The clicking stopped on the instant, but what was my amazement to find a neat typescript lying on the keyboard! I took it up and read: 'The Baronet's Bride: Chapter I'; and this that follows, misprints and all, is what the typewriter—so far as I could judge, without human aid—had clicked out in the teashop and on the way home in the taxicab:

### CHAP. I

The most beautiful woman in England was sitting with her feet on the sofa, in the most beautiful drawing-room in the most beautiful square in the West End of London.

At times she would sit up as if listening eagerly for someone. Then, with a sigh of impatience, she would sink back & draw a deep breath of tobacco through her jewelled cigarette-holder.

As she exhaled the smoke, she took the holder from her exquisitely curved lips & smiled

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mysteriously while she read for the thousandth time the inscription printed in diamonds on the stem : ' To La Belle Cora From Her Bobo.'

' Poor Bobo,' she reflected, & she gave a little upward-tinkling laugh as she thought of that unhappy prince & of the fortune he had squandered on her.

Bobo had wanted to make her a queen, Heir to a kingdom in the South-East of Europe, he had flung himself & all his possessions at her feet, & she had accepted most of them except the offer of marriage.

' Poor Bobo,' she thought, & a tear stood in the corner of her beautiful almond-shaped eye, & as it fell left a little irregular track down her painted cheek, for La Belle Cora had a soft heart, & she told herself with a twinge that but for her the most promising scion of royalty in Europe would not now be languishing in a home for dipsomaniacs while detectives from Scotland Yard waited on the door-step to arrest him as soon as he had recovered on a charge of forgery.

La Belle Cora, judged by conventional standards, was not a good woman. Men had called her thief, harpy, blackmailer, & worse. But with all her sins her heart overflowed with pity as she recalled the bright promise of that wonderful youth & the wreck that she & her companions in crime had made of it.

Bobo had been the beautiful ideal of a prince when she had first met him. If ever a man deserved

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to be described as *mens sana in corpore sano* it was he. He was brilliant alike in feats of the mind & in feats of the body. He had played a leading part in the revival of his country's drama, & he had spread his country's fame through the length & breadth of Europe by his daring exploits as an amateur steeple-chase-rider. A great career seemed to be opening out before him in that year in which within a few months he both rode the winner of the grand National & was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Add to this the fact that he was a man whom success could not apparently spoil.

'It's nothing,' he said, with a laugh, when he was interviewed by pressmen after his victory at Aintree. 'My horse ran away with me & I couldn't stop him: it might have happened to anybody.'

And when all Europe was acclaiming him as the greatest poetic dramatist since Shakespeare, he said: 'Oh, come. Come, now.'

The truth is, he regarded both literature & sport as the merest trifles compared to the great task to which he had set himself—the task of leaving the world better than he found it.

Cora recalled with a wistful shake of the head that those were the very words he had used to her on the occasion of their first meeting. It was at the most brilliant ambassadorial reception of the season. Balchester House was

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thronged with titled women ablaze with jewels, & among the men who were present, three out of four were even more conspicuous on account of their emminence in world affairs than because of the orders & decorations they wore on their breasts. Yet in all that gilded & famous throng it was she whom the handsome, shy, young prince had singled out with a request to the Duke of Shrbourne to obtain him an introduction.

They had not been talking about for more than a few seconds, when her ear caught above the general buzz of the conversation, words that sounded like 'leave the world better than I found it.'

'That is what we should all try to do, Prince,' she had said, dropping her eyes before his intense gaze.

'And you,' she had heard him whisper huskily, 'you will help me in my great task?'

As she looked up into his liquid eyes she was swept off her feet by his passionate sincerity & with a flushed cheek, she murmured: 'Yes, Prince, you can trust me. Come & see me at my flat tomorrow; you will find the address in the telephone-book.'

'A rividerci,' smiled the prince, as he sidled off through the throng.

She was still watching his handsome head bobbing in the distance, between two crowded rows of tiaras, when she was aware of a cold

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unpleasant touch above her right elbow. Looking round, she met the sheering, vulturine face of Sir Geoffrey Shadley. He was a man whose natural expression was so snake-like that it was often difficult to tell whether he was sneering or smiling.

'Well, Cora,' he said, 'who's Angelface?'

'I don't know what you're talking about,' she said with a shrug of annoyance.

'You don't know, I suppose,' he addressed her gruffly, 'that the man who has just left you is one of the wealthiest royalties in Europe? And that if the gang can but get him into its clutches, I & you & the rest of us are made for life.'

'If you so much as injure a hair of that young man's head,' she began, vehemently

'Hush, hush' muttered Sir Geoffrey, better known in the purlieus off Soho as Jesuit Jeff; for he had noticed that the Home Secretary, passing through the crowd in his gold-braided cocked-hat, had paused as if to listen.

Cora herself went pale as the Home Secretary came for reward to shake her by the hand. She knew that on several occasions deputation orders bearing her own name had been placed before him for his signature, & that it was only because several members of the Cabinet who were inextricably entangled in the colossal web of the gang, had outvoted their colleagues on the matter at Cabinet meeting after Cabinet



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meettang, that she was not now eking out a precarious existence in the shadier casinos of her own country.

‘ Well,’ said the Home Secretary ‘ & how did prince Boris impress you ? ’

‘ I thought him perfectly marvellous, perfectly marvellous, Sir John ’ & as she spoke she was conscious of Sir Geoffrey’s evil sneer at her right shoulder.

‘ If any-thing happened to the prince during his visit to England,’ said Sir John solemnly, ‘ it would mean the downfall of the government—perhaps even worse than that.’

‘ But nothing *could* happen to him, Sir John,’ she cried, speaking as earnestly as he.

‘ No, of course nothing could happen to him,’ said Sir Geoffrey, & he burst into a loud laugh which made Cora’s blood run cold & the Home Secretary stare at him in amazement.

. . . . .

That was as far as the automatic writing had gone. I carefully locked up the instrument again, and listened eagerly for a repetition of the clicking, for I admit that I had fallen under the spell of La Belle Cora, and longed to hear of her ultimate redemption and of how Prince Boris escaped from the clutches alike of Scotland Yard and of the gang of which Sir Geoffrey was so sinister a member. But no sound came, and,

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though I open the case every morning hopefully, not another page has since been added to the story. What the explanation of it all is I do not know. Was the machine, when I first bought it, still acting under the influence of the famous author, and did it cease to write when it realized that it was in the hands of a stranger? If I had not positively heard the clicking, I should believe that the typescript had been left there by the author in mistake. I have written to him begging him to call on me in the hope that his presence in the room may reawaken the instrument to activity. If it does not, I am afraid Cora must remain for ever a beautiful torso, and none of us will ever know even why the story of the great love of her life was called 'The Baronet's Bride'.

## XXVIII. Wet Weather      ~      ~      ~

I HEAR men who have returned from their summer holidays boasting that they had not a single wet day between leaving London and returning to it. My own boast is different. I, too, have been out of London for a month, and there was not a single day on which it did not either rain or look as if it were going to rain. We had thunder, rain, wind, clouds, sunshine, cold, and steamy warmth—all the delicious variety of the four seasons, indeed, but for the absence of snow and ice. There was a cloudburst during a thunderstorm one night, which poured through the roof of the hotel at three o'clock in the morning and drove a lady from her room, and which tore a trench two feet deep in the road leading to the garage. Nothing like it, the old man who mended the road told me, had happened for fifty-one years: it was like the end of the world, he said. Yet, however the sky thundered and the floods fell, the old barometer in the hall always stood at almost six o'clock for the fairest of fair weather. It was the most optimistic barometer I have ever seen. It was broken.

It may be that the barometer infected me with its hopes and brightened each wet day with the prophecy of the next day's sunshine.

## It's a Fine World

Whatever may have been the reason, I did not, even on the wettest day, envy for a moment those who were basking on warmer shores. It is almost impossible on earth to be sure of getting the place you want and the weather you want at the same time, and I would always rather have the place I want than the weather I want, especially if I can persuade myself that the weather I want is going to appear within the next few hours. And I certainly had the place I wanted. Why, one afternoon I drove to a small town ten miles off to buy a newspaper, and when I asked for a daily paper—any daily paper—the woman in the shop looked through her wares and said: 'I haven't to-day's paper. Would yesterday's be any use to you?' and I replied that yesterday's paper was better than no paper at all, and bought it. That is the kind of place I like, even though the rain beats the sea into a million tiny fountains. If only there had been no delivery of letters, I should have liked it better; but one cannot have everything.

It is also the motorists' Paradise. Some of the roads are so bad that it is possible to drive for an hour on them without meeting another car. I had no road-map at first, and so was constantly losing myself on the worst of them, bumping over ruts and stones that must have been there since Adam's time. When I arrived home one night after corkscrewing down a long, steep hill with a surface of this kind, a doctor

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said to me : ' Only one motorist in three that comes down Glengesh Hill comes down it alive.' It was a lie, of course, but it was an agreeable lie, giving one a sense of having lived dangerously. I feel sure that when the world has been netted with beautiful wide roads with perfect surfaces, there will be a demand for a reversion to the old-fashioned type of country road, all stones and holes, except on routes used purely for business. I can think of no better plan for preserving the beauties of the countryside. Make speed-tracks through the glens and among the mountains, and you will turn the loveliest places on earth into Brightons and Worthing. Bad roads and abundance of rain, on the other hand, will do more to keep the world as unspoiled as it once was than all the activities of the Society for the Preservation of Rural Amenities.

Not that rain is an unmixed blessing. Even I wished that it were not raining so heavily on the day on which we were going to a horse-race fifty miles away. Yet what a solitude it was among the mountains, with their peaks hidden in the marching clouds, and with no human being on the road for mile after mile ! We met only three cars in twenty miles. People were sitting inside them, eating sandwiches and drinking things out of thermos flasks, at the head of a long lake among the hills. They looked as desolate as drenched poultry as we drove past them. The races were due to begin at two, and

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it was already three as we approached the field where they were to be held. We began to fear we should miss the great race of the day—the Derby, as it is called—which was to take place at three o'clock. We arrived at the gate of the field, paid a shilling a head, and pushed our way through in the mud. We climbed up one muddy, slippery hill, and slid down another, determined above all things to be in time for the race. The field itself was surrounded with flags to mark the course. There were booths everywhere for the sale of lemonade, the form of dried seaweed called dulse, and sweetstuffs, including conversation lozenges. Huge umbrellas, with floods of rain falling on them, covered a score of silent bookmakers. No horse was in sight, save one poor animal that was being walked round and round in a ring. Country people huddled against the booths for shelter from the driving rain, too woebegone even to buy dulse or conversation lozenges. We, too, huddled behind a booth for shelter, waiting for something to happen, and every two minutes I emptied the water out of the brim of my hat in a stream. We waited for a quarter of an hour, glad at least to have arrived in time for the Derby. At the end of another quarter of an hour I asked somebody when the next race was expected to begin. 'We haven't had the first race yet,' he said, resignedly. I went to a stall and bought some conversation lozenges to break

## Wet Weather

the monotony—each lozenge bearing in red letters some such inscription as : ‘ Name the happy day ’, ‘ I love you ’, or ‘ You are nobody’s darling ’. I emptied the water out of my hat-brim again, wondering in what tongue-tied land this noble substitute for lovers’ talk had originated. Some strong, silent Scottish confectioner, no doubt, finding himself persistently dumb in the presence of his goddess had had the ingenious notion of letting his wares utter those words which his lips could not ; and, succeeding in his suit, he had distributed his sugared *billets-doux* among his strong, silent neighbours. They have sunk to sweetmeats for children by now, but who knows how many unsyllabled Romeos in the past may have won their Juliets with a conversation lozenge slipped into the hand during the singing of a psalm ?

A bell rang, and, emptying the brim of my hat, I walked in the mud towards the starting-place, hoping that some horses would appear. I waited some time in the rain ; another bell rang, but still no horses. I emptied my hat-brim again, and joined a circle of depressed farmers and their wives and daughters and listened to a ballad-singer who was howling, with every appearance of agony, a ballad in which he repeatedly appealed to the derisive heavens :

Lay me where sweet flowers blossom,  
Where the dainty lily grows,  
Where the pinks and violets mingle,  
Lay my head beneath the rose.

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When he came round for money, I asked him if he had any printed ballads for sale, hoping for a ballad that smacked of the soil. 'I have, sir,' he said, and drew a ballad-sheet from his sleeve and handed it to me. It contained the words of 'Sonny Boy'.

Having once more emptied my hat-brim, I strolled over to a crowd that was standing round a table on which a man was rattling dice and inviting the world to play at the fine old game of Crown and Anchor. 'It's a fair game,' he was saying; 'it's a fair game. The wee boy has the same chance as the old man, and the old man as the wee boy.' A wee boy, encouraged, placed a penny on the anchor—always referred to as 'the hook'. Two or three other pennies were staked. The dice fell, and everybody had won. 'Nothing could be fairer than that,' said the man, as he paid out. The wee boy and the others staked again, and this time nobody won. 'Thank the Lord for that!' said the man, picking up the pennies; 'we've all got to live.' I joined in the game, won sixpence and lost it again, when the bell rang for the dozenth time, and the bookmakers began shouting. Excitement was in the air. We should now have a race. Shillings and betting-tickets changed hands, mostly at even money. A horse appeared from behind a hedge at the far end of the field. The bell rang several times, and at last three horses appeared. The jockeys took off their



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coats and rode their horses to the starting-place. They stood there in a line while the drenched onlookers stared at them. We waited. Another bell rang. One of the jockeys dismounted. Then, after some consultation, the other jockeys dismounted and put on their coats ; and the horses were led off the field. In a few minutes we all knew that—for a reason not creditable to one of the jockeys, if true—the race had been declared off. The bookmakers were returning the bets. It was now after four, we were soaked to the skin, and all that had yet happened was the singing of a ballad.

Bells continued to ring during the next quarter of an hour, and the rain to fall, and a horse was still being walked in a ring on the squelching grass. Then, about half-past four, the bookmakers chalked up the names of four horses, and shouted the odds for the next race. A bell rang again, and a horse appeared, and it cannot have been long after half-past four when four horses were lined up behind the starter's flag. The flag fell ; they started, and were called back again. Once more the flag fell ; they started, and were called back again. A third time the same thing happened, but, not noticing that they had been recalled, three of the jockeys galloped off, hell for leather, down the course. The crowd yelled after them. The first jockey looked back, and, seeing other horses

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behind him, took the yells for yells of encouragement. The second and third jockeys, seeing the other jockey galloping ahead of them, tore after him ; and they were the most astonished youths in the world when, having made the round of the field, they found half the spectators standing in the middle of the course, with their arms in the air, calling on them to stop. The horse which I had backed, merely because it was the outsider, had meanwhile stood still at the starting-post. The jockeys on the other horses dismounted, and it seemed at first as if they were sulkily refusing to take part in the race. The crowd would have none of this, however. Like a wave, we swept over the rope that marked off the course, trampled it under foot, and rushed in the mud towards the jockeys, making threatening gestures and uttering inarticulate cries. They were persuaded to remount, and by a quarter to five the race—three times round the field—really started, my horse being second the first time round, while every jockey's face was an inch deep in the mud that was flung up by the horses' feet as they galloped. At the end of the second round my horse was leading. I was wet to the skin, but didn't care. He was leading still at the third time round, and, not having tired himself with the preliminary round, was an easy winner.

It was nearly five, and we had fifty miles to drive across the mountains, so we decided to go

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home. We struggled through mud, ankle-deep, out of the field and drank some hot tea, while an old woman sang 'The Bard of Armagh' in the street outside the hotel. We had had a good day. We told each other that we wouldn't have missed it for worlds.

And what would I not give to-day, sweltering here in a London heat-wave, to be back in a soaking waterproof (so-called), with the mud beneath my feet and the rain spouting from my hat-brim, dripping from my nose, and trickling down the back of my neck !

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